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Following Movement

A Comparative Analysis on the Motives and the Implications of Movement
in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *On the Road* and *Into the Wild*

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to my parents, who taught me how to wander

O highway I travel, do you say to me *Do not leave me?*
Do you say *Venture not—if you leave me you are lost?*
Do you say *I am already prepared,*
I am well-beaten and undenied, adhere to me?

O public road, I say back I am not afraid to leave you, yet I love you,
You express me better than I can express myself,
You shall be more to me than my poem.

Walt Whitman
“Song of the Open Road,” l. 42-48

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Comparing Movement

A General Introduction

[T]here's so many things to do,
so many things to write!

(Kerouac, 4)

There is a disturbing inadequacy between the clear fascination that Americans have for the road and the small quantity of critical works focusing on the genre of American road literature. There is indeed a gigantic amount of American road novels – whose production regularly increases – for just a handful of academic works on the literary genre. The work of Ronald Primeau – who published *Romance of the Road: the Literature of the American Highway* and recently edited *Critical Insights: American Road Literature* – probably is the most elaborated piece of critical work on the subject. In *Romance of the Road*, Primeau attempts to give a definition to the genre, acknowledging “the enormous range of available materials” (Primeau, ix) and therefore deciding to establish a series of limits in order to consider a coherent corpus. According to the American critic, the literary genre gathers “fiction and nonfiction books by Americans who travel by car throughout the country either on a quest or simply to get away” (1). Such a definition immediately excludes any story on a boat, on a train, on a hot-air balloon or on any other means of transportation not being able to ride the American highway. Besides, that postulate accordingly delimitates a period, starting with the invention of the automobile which occurred around the end of the 19th century.¹ By defining all these boundaries, Primeau somehow makes the choice to identify “road literature” as a subpart of “travel literature.”²

Apart from the place, the period and the means of transportation, Ronald Primeau defines the reasons and motivations triggering the journey on the American road in *Romance*

¹ As Michael L. Berger claims in *The Automobile in America History and Culture*: “Although people had dreamed of a self-propelled vehicle for centuries, it was not until the end of the 19th century that a practical road machine capable of sustained distances emerged for general use” (Berger, xvii).

² As any attempt of definition and periodization of an artistic genre, Ronald Primeau's postulate is open to criticism. The most questionable criterion probably is the car condition. Indeed, the American road does not necessarily need a car to be travelled. In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* – which is the subject of one of the chapters of Primeau's *Critical Insights: American Road Literature* –, a father and his son merely walk on the American road at the wheel of a shopping cart filled with blankets and groceries. The car criterion cannot be eliminatory and Ronald Primeau somehow already acknowledges the limits of his own definition in *Romance of the Road*, by demanding two “notable exceptions” (Primeau, ix). The first one concerns *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and the second one concerns Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

of the Road. “[E]ither on a quest or simply to get away” (Primeau, 1), the traveller seems to always have a clear motive justifying his direction. One of the purposes of this master’s thesis is to specifically focus on those motives that trigger and justify movement. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *On the Road* (1957) and *Into the Wild* (1996) constitute the limited corpus of this mémoire,³ for they all consecutively take the shape of escape and search during their narration. In each one of these stories, the multifaceted movement rules and seems to be the main protagonist. It systematically disturbs the initial situation, organizes the plot’s evolution and dictates the rhythm of the narration. This master’s thesis thus presents a comparative study between these three American road novels from the 19th and the 20th century. Not only do these literary works share numerous textual resemblances, but they also seem to present a similar pattern articulating their narration. By observing the narrative configuration of these different novels, one can identify a structure repeating itself. Led and linked by restless movement, the characters of these road novels share indeed an uncannily similar journey, going from rejection and confrontation, to search and construction, to addiction and perdition.

Written in the end of the 19th century, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* tells the story of a boy and a slave escaping from civilization by voyaging on a raft along the Mississippi river. In spite of the car condition conveyed in Ronald Primeau’s definition of the genre of American road literature, the critic decides to include *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the literary corpus of his work. One of the reasons justifying Primeau’s demand of a “notable exception[...]Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is indeed considered by many academics as one of the cornerstones of the literary genre. In “The American Tramp: A Version of the Picaresque,” John D. Seelye writes that “boys who, like [Jack] London, went on the road, were acting out the role established by Huckleberry Finn” (Seelye, 547). In “Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of the American Fiction,” Morris Dickstein also claims the pioneer status of the boy’s adventure, mentioning a series of “picaresque novels of flights and adventure loosely based on Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*” (Dickstein, *Leopards*, 10):

³ Although other road narratives – such as *Streets of Night* (1923), *Travels with Charley* (1962), *Even Cow Girls Get the Blues* (1976) or *Blue Highways* (1982) – will be discussed during this master’s thesis in order to give a more general resonance to the critical analysis.

All these [later novels from *On the Road* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* to Portnoy's *Complaint* and *Bright Lights, Big City*...] go back in different ways to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

(Dickstein, *Leopards*, 91)

Huckleberry Finn's adventure on the Mississippi somehow started a legacy, inspiring a long series of escape and search narratives on the American road. This founding status justified Primeau's choice to integrate Twain's novel in *Romance of the Road*. It also partly explains the choice to include it this *mémoire*. Moreover, it turns out that *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* perfectly articulates the combination between escape and quest throughout its narration. Escaping from civilization, from the violence of slavery and that of his father, Huck Finn ventures on the Mississippi river, trying to find personal construction and emancipation. Finally, Mark Twain's novel presents an unexpected conclusion that unveils a complex field of investigation. At the end of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the young boy decides to "light out for the Territory" (Twain, 281) and therefore extends movement beyond the frame of the narration. That invincible movement surviving the last page of the novel deserves reflection and engenders a long series of questions. Where did Huck Finn go? Why did he go? And for how long?

Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* also concludes itself with an extension of movement beyond the boundary of the narration. Even though Sal Paradise eventually stops crossing and re-crossing the American territory at the end the novel, Dean Moriarty keeps restlessly wandering on his own. This similitude is one of the numerous links that can be found between *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *On the Road*. Jack Kerouac's work is indeed the first of the "later novels" (Dickstein, *Leopards*, 91) that Morris Dickstein qualifies as successors of Mark Twain's adventure novel. Besides, in his biography of the American writer, Warren French argues that Kerouac's first attempt of writing a novel when he was an adolescent – which tells the story of "an orphan boy running away, floating down a river on a boat" (Warren, 4) – is "an apparently quite slavish imitation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" (4). Although *On the Road* is one of the heirs of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, it nonetheless independently played a major role in the history of the genre of American road literature. The novel is indeed considered by Ronald Primeau as "the prototype of the genre" (Primeau, 26). Besides, it can be noticed that in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, the genre of road literature is only briefly introduced in a chapter dedicated to the *Beat Generation*. Kerouac's novel gave to American road literature its popularity, its unity and perhaps even its name. It inspired a still-growing series of road novels and somehow

transfigured the way Americans perceive the road. One may say that *On the Road* occupies the most central position of the argumentation of this master's thesis. Indeed, by telling the story of two runaway men restlessly searching for something they never find, Jack Kerouac's "prototype" impeccably fits the pattern structuring the argumentation of this master's thesis. Finally, being a work of fiction directly inspired from a real life experience, Jack Kerouac's hybrid novel somehow facilitates the transition between *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the nonfictional narration of *Into the Wild*.

Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* tells the tragic odyssey of a young man abandoning civilization in order to find freedom and happiness on the wild road of America. Despite many differences with *On the Road* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Krakauer's novel harmoniously complements the corpus of this mémoire, thanks to its strikingly similar combination between escape, search and tragedy. Moreover, one may say that *Into the Wild* actually enriches the corpus of this project and gives it a sense of unity. Indeed, by delivering a third person nonfictional road narrative dating from the end of the 20th century, *Into the Wild* offers a new perspective. It somehow completes a varied corpus, which eventually covers many specificities of the genre of American road literature.⁴ Moreover, the fact that *Into the Wild* is a nonfictional narrative – which does not contradict Ronald Primeau's definition of the genre of road literature – perhaps adds a touch of reality to the complex relationship between men and movement in America. Another input of Krakauer's novel to the corpus of this project is its focus on the theme of *wilderness*. In *Into the Wild*, not only the road but also the wilderness is presented as a shelter from society. That fascination for the wild nature opens a new range of discussion, making tangible the dangerousness of the journey and allowing a parallel between the itinerary of the modern wanderer and the one of the American pioneer. Finally, that appeal for the wilderness, nourished by a desire to go back to a form of natural purity, may recall the ideology spread by the American poets of the romantic era. Walt Whitman – who Chris frequently reads and quotes during his journey – published "Song of the Open Road" in his 1856 collection *Leaves of Grass*: "Allons! whoever you are come travel with me! Traveling with me you find what never tires" (Whitman, 131). The poem is a celebration of the road, an invitation to wander, that all the protagonists of the corpus of this

⁴ It goes without saying that many elements from the genre of American road literature are not represented in the corpus of this master's thesis. Although the three different novels cover together different periods, narrative modes, styles and structures, they cannot be considered as faithful representatives of the literary genre. First and foremost, all the protagonists of this corpus somehow look alike. The wanderers are indeed all young and white men, experiencing a pivotal moment in their life. The most important shortcoming of this corpus probably is that homogeneity unifying the figure of the travelling hero – excluding women, ethnic minorities and elderly people, amongst many others.

master's thesis seem to have embraced at the beginning of their journey. Furthermore, as the romantic poet escorted Chris McCandless throughout his odyssey, his poetic ode to movement will also sensibly accompany the three chapters of this master's thesis.

Following movement – through all its complexity and evolution – is the guiding line of this master's thesis. The fundamental objective of this project is to elaborate a critical analysis of a literary corpus through the study of that specific narrative theme. This critical perspective may engender a series of interrogations: Why the use of a comparative approach to discuss the genre of American road literature? How can the study of a specific and recurrent narrative element enlighten our understanding of a literary text and genre? The main answer to all these questions is that a comparative reading cannot be productive without the election of a thematic. Randomly comparing literary texts, articulating connections and interpretations – even if they are legitimate – without scrupulously keeping a guiding line simply cannot produce a sustainable argumentation. By rigorously focusing on movement, this comparative analysis has a chance to generate a channeled and organized stream of reflection. The *constraint* of following movement gives an identity to the project. Although detours and digressions are possible, the point of view cannot slip away as long as movement remains the ultimate target. Moreover, by focusing on movement – a narrative element supplied by the literary texts themselves – the comparative approach cannot drift away from the text. It remains both *à propos* – closely related to the reality of the primary source – and free to make new parallels and significations emerge. Finally, the restraint of following one narrative element forces the reader to look at the text from a viewpoint that would have never naturally asserted itself. It consequently allows a new perspective, an unexpected angle of analysis and inevitably unveils new significations and interpretations. Following movement through *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *On the Road* and *Into the Wild* is both a limiting constraint and a useful solution. It is a liberating rule that proves to be absolutely necessary to conduct a productive comparative approach.

The study of this master's thesis is divided into three chapters, each analyzing movement from a different perspective. “Running Away” – the first chapter of this project – will develop the idea that movement is systematically triggered by rejection and confrontation in the three novels of the corpus. The journey indeed always begins with an escape, with a rejection of authority, of civilization, of normalization or of a past generation. This first chapter will therefore focus on the initial situation of the three road narratives, attempting to show how the decision to run away may appear as a solution to confront authority and dominant ideology. “Running After” – the second chapter of this master's thesis – will focus

on movement as a search. It will also attempt to analyze the implications of the journey on the personal construction of the travelling hero. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *On the Road* and *Into the Wild* tell the evolution of individuals growing up on the road, looking for answers and trying to shape their own identity. If movement is triggered by rejection and initially takes the shape of an escape, it also leads to a search: a search for origins, for national identity and for personal construction. “Just Running” – the third and final chapter of this master’s thesis – will discuss the tragic note concluding those three road narratives. When movement dramatically pursues itself without any real justification and unveils itself as the journey’s actual destination, the wanderer inevitably gets lost and the narration shifts from comedy to tragedy. Being first a means of rejection as well as a way to salvation, the insatiable movement progressively divulges itself as a dangerous path to perdition. *Following Movement* will therefore attempt to analyze the complex evolution of that multi-faceted movement and to show how its restlessness is at the origin of the tragic dimension of American road novels such as *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *On the Road* and *Into the Wild*.

Running Away

Movement as a Means of Escape, Resistance and Confrontation

*I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out.
I got into my old rags and my sugar-hogshead
again, and was free and satisfied.*

(Twain, 11)

What triggers a journey? What is at the origin of the abandonment of home for the sake of the adventurous road? In *Blue Highway*, William Least Heat-Moon starts the autobiographical narration of his 13,000-mile journey by saying that “[a] man who couldn’t make things go right could at least go” (Heat-Moon, 1). It is a need for change and a decision to start over again that often triggers the departure of the protagonists of road novels from their hometown. As Ronald Primeau claims in *Romance of the Road*, “[t]he decision to go on the road most often arises from some dissatisfaction or desire for change” (Primeau, 15). The characters who leave their home are unsatisfied individuals who suddenly decide to break the routine of their life and to reject the civilization they live in. It can be noticed that the starting point of the three American road novels belonging to the corpus of this master’s thesis is indeed an escape, a flight from civilization, from authority and from social expectations. In each one of these road novels, civilization is presented as a restrictive milieu, as a liberty-killing environment governed by oppressive rules and obligations. Coming all from various eras and having all their own and specific backgrounds, the different protagonists of these road stories all seem to share a similar feeling of rebellion and an urgency to run away from that golden cage that Huckleberry Finn misspells “sivilization.” Besides, more than a way out, the road may be a way *against*, ostensibly used by the protagonists as a means of resistance and confrontation. In each one of these novels, the road appears as a liberating answer, as a solution to defy power, to be freed of a heritage and to challenge the mainstream ideology of civilization.

“Let the school stand”

Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* starts its narration with an escape. Tired of being controlled by the rules of the Widow Douglas, Huckleberry Finn takes off his clean clothes in exchange for his old rags and flees for the very first time on the American road:

The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out. I got into my old rags and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied.

(Twain, 11)

Getting rid of the Widow Douglas's oppressing "sivilization" finally allows Huck Finn to be "free and satisfied" (11). With that first escape, the concept of freedom – that will remain omnipresent throughout the novel – appears for the very first time. Movement is immediately associated to a sense of deliverance and liberation. However, this first redeeming road trip does not last longer than a line, since Huckleberry Finn immediately comes back to St. Petersburg in order to join the band of robbers that Tom Sawyer is about to create in his absence. The young boy therefore goes back to the Widow's house and starts sweating again in his oppressive attire. Although delighted by the tales and inventions of his friend Tom Sawyer, he remains uncomfortable, a motionless marginal imprisoned in the "sivilization" he is forced to live in. The beginning of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* thus revolves around that sensation of oppression, presenting Huck Finn as drastically against the proper and civilized society of St. Petersburg: "I didn't want to go back to the widow's any more and be so cramped up and sivilized, as they called it" (33). It can be noticed that this feeling of captivity is partially represented by the unbearable cleanness of the clothes that Huckleberry Finn is forced to wear under the guardianship of the Widow. That neatness literally suffocates Huckleberry who "[cannot] do nothing but sweat and sweat, and feel all cramped up" (11). This socially acceptable uniform goes hand to hand with a role that Huck Finn is forced to perform in that proper civilization; a role where he has to "behave," "to pray every day" (20) and to "set up straight" (12); a role where he is not allowed to "scrunch up like that" (12), to "put [his] feet up there," to smoke his pipe or to "gap and stretch like that" (12). That accumulation of restrictions and social obligations is at the origin of Huckleberry Finn's desire to go on an adventure and to choose the bad places instead of the good manners: "[The Widow Douglas] told me all about the bad place, and I said I wished I was there" (12).

It can be noticed that a passage from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is quoted at the beginning of the seventh chapter of Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*: "There was some books. ... One was Pilgrim's Progress, about a man that left his family, it didn't say why. I read considerable in it now and then. The statements was interesting, but tough" (Twain, 103 – Krakauer, 61). As already mentioned in the general introduction to this master's thesis, Mark Twain's novel left a legacy behind and opened the path to many road narratives. In *Leopards*

in the Temple, American critic Morris Dickstein makes a parallel between *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and all those novels depicting flights from civilization:

All these young heroes, like Huck Finn himself, are searching for freedom, eager to escape the conventional and oppressive social roles that others have foisted on them.

(Dickstein, *Leopards*, 10)

One may say that Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* – as well as Kerouac's *On the Road* – follow that tradition of the young and lost hero, suddenly deciding to go on the road in order to escape the conventional world of civilization. However, at first sight, the protagonist of *Into the Wild* does not seem to have a lot in common with Huckleberry Finn. Unlike Huck, Chris McCandless is not a ragged motherless child, a lost boy on the fringe of society with an alcoholic father as sole masculine model. Chris is indeed presented in Krakauer's non-fiction novel as a promising young man, as a bright and successful student who "excelled academically and had been an elite athlete" (Krakauer, i). Chris seems to possess everything needed to be in agreement with the social requirement of American civilization. However, just like Huckleberry Finn, Chris does not fit in the world he was born in. The talented man who claims that "titles and honors are irrelevant" (20) and that "careers [are] demeaning twentieth-century inventions" (114) seems indeed to suffer from the same feeling of rebellion against civilization as Huckleberry Finn. Both protagonists claim to prefer the freedom of the wilderness to the strictness of the urban and civilized world. Moreover, both hate socio-normative proprieties and are uncomfortable in uniforms. Indeed, whereas one cannot stand to wear the clean clothes imposed by the Widow Douglas, the other "always [wears] shoes without socks — just plain [cannot] stand to wear socks" (40). Finally, both use movement as a solution to escape from their respective oppressive social environment. One day, without notice, Huck and Chris suddenly leave their parents, deciding to light out and to abandon the world of their childhood. Huck leaves Pap's cabin and goes down the Mississippi river on a raft. As for Chris, he "[loads] all his belongings into his little car and [heads] west without an itinerary" (22). By leaving civilization, Chris McCandless attempts to escape and gets lost in the wild. The young scholar thus crosses the mythical American frontier, choosing the dangerous wilderness instead of the civilized "world of abstraction, false security, parents, and material excess" (22). Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* is inscribed in the legacy of Mark Twain's pioneer novel. It tells the true story of a young man who "went on and on about Mark Twain" (67) and obviously read *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Leaving civilization by

getting lost in the wilderness seems to be his personal and modern way of sailing Huck's famous raft.

"I wanted to take off" (Kerouac, 8) says Sal Paradise at the beginning of *On the Road*. The urgency to leave civilization also appears to be one of the decisive elements that triggers the journey told in Jack Kerouac's road novel. Like Huck and Chris,⁵ Sal decides to leave his comfortable home, to abandon the familial nest of his childhood for the sake of the dangerous and adventurous road:

[F]olding back my comfortable home sheets for the last time one morning, I left with my canvas bag in which a few fundamental things were packed and took off for the Pacific Ocean with the fifty dollars in my pocket.

(Kerouac, 9)

At the beginning of Kerouac's road novel, Sal is presented as a college man tired of the intellectual surrounding he always knew. The young writer complains about the homogeneity of his social milieu, saying that all his "current friends [are] intellectuals" (7) and that his "life hanging around the campus [has] reached the completion of its cycle and [is] stultified" (7). In *Understanding Jack Kerouac*, Matt Theado also highlights this frustration, describing Sal Paradise as "enervated, believing his college experience [is] unproductive" (Theado, 61). At the beginning of the novel, Sal repeats over and over that his only dream is to flee and go west "to see the country" (Kerouac, 1). As Chris McCandless who claims that "[t]he joy of life comes from our encounter with new experiences" (Krakauer, 57), Sal wants to get away from the academic civilization, to experience the world by wandering through the American West, instead of just analyzing it by staying inert in an Eastern campus. This confrontation between empirical travel and indoor study may remind a major topic discussed in Walt Whitman's poetry, and more specifically in "Song of the Open Road." In this celebration of the road, the American poet says that "[w]isdom is not finally tested in schools" and claims to be "[d]one with indoor complaints, libraries [and] querulous criticisms" (Whitman, 126):

Let the paper remain on the desk unwritten, and the book on the shelf unopen'd!
Let the tools remain in the workshop! let the money remain unearn'd!
Let the school stand! mind not the cry of the teacher!

(Whitman, 135)

⁵*On the Road* presents a series of secondary characters that also use the American road as a way to escape from civilization. Sal meets for instance that Irish hitchhiker, "running away from something in New York, the law most likely" (Kerouac, 16). He also briefly observes those men "waiting for their ship ... bound for Okinawa ... running away from something - usually the law" (65). He also hears about that "husband that [ran] away" (224) or gets to know that "blond kid [who] ... seemed to be running away from something" (23).

The famous and complex Whitmanesque conflict, opposing nature to culture, can also be perceived in one of Sal's reflections while he is travelling through the Arizona desert: "I had a book with me I stole from a Hollywood stall, *Le Grand Meaulnes* by Alain-Fournier, but I preferred reading the American landscape as we went along" (Kerouac, 103). On the road, Sal Paradise can put aside dead academic knowledge to contemplate the purity of the living landscape. It can be noticed that all Huck, Chris and Sal decide to embrace Whitman's invitation to "[l]et the school stand" (Whitman, 135) at the beginning of their adventures. They all chose to challenge the education offered by their civilization through the experience of the living American road.

Running away from civilizing women

An analysis of these three road novels cannot be made without noticing a shared urgency to escape from women. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *On the Road* and *Into the Wild*, the fleeing protagonists choose to hit the road in order to run away from the proper and normative fate they are destined to follow. Women seem to be one of the main "civilizing" elements that the protagonists are decided to flee from. Indeed, it can be noticed that both *On the Road* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* start with an escape from a feminine guardian substituting a mother figure – the Widow Douglas in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Sal's unnamed aunt in *On the Road*. Moreover, in both of these novels, the adventurous road seems to be exclusively masculine and women are presented as dangerous civilizing creatures that need to be avoided. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, all the Widow Douglas, Miss Watson, Aunt Sally and Aunt Polly are associated to civilization and Huck systematically ends up running away from them, even if they are just trying to take care of him. In "Peasant Dreams: Reading *On the Road*," Mark Richardson highlights what he calls "Huck's flight from femininity" (Richardson, 233):

Having already been subject to the regime of the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson, Hucks lights out for the territory when Sally Phelps, another Old Christian Woman, threatens to civilize him.

(Richardson, 233)

In *Into the Wild*, Chris McCandless runs away from both his mother and his father. Suggesting the idea of a "flight from femininity" in that case would therefore be inaccurate. However, it can be noticed that Chris is presented throughout Krakauer's narration as "largely or entirely celibate, as chaste as a monk" (Krakauer, 65), as an almost asexual character,

totally unable to include women in the impulsivity of his journey. Chris does not seem to be really trying to flee from women, but rather to be afraid of relationship and commitment. The young adventurer claims that “[y]ou are wrong if you think Joy emanates only ... from human relationships” (57) and admits that “we like companionship” but that “we can’t stand to be around people for very long” (96).

The anxiety about commitment can also be found in the story line of *On the Road*. During Kerouac’s road novel, Sal Paradise accumulates romantic affairs but never seems able to settle down until the end. In “Free Ways and Straight Roads,” Lars Erik Larson says that “[p]art of the novel’s portrayal of the road-as-playground for these men comes from its participation in the tradition of mobility as a retreat from ... women” (Larson, 42). In this same article, the American critic also makes a parallel between Kerouac’s highway and Twain’s river, defining both of them as a dividing frontier allowing an escape from the hold of women:

Kerouac shows the modern highway as providing the spatial role that the frontier, the raft, and the bachelor clubhouse had served previous American texts, for isolating men from women, maternal oversight, and marriage.

(Larson. 42)

In *On the Road*, the highway is indeed a masculine “playground” where women are only considered as disposable toys. During their journey, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty just enjoy themselves, having fun and meaningless sex without falling into commitment – even when they are married. Sal and Dean yet have several relationships with women during their journey. However, as soon as they start settling down, fear and anxiety reappear, aborting the relationship and leading the bachelors back to the infinite highway. There is indeed no apparent reason for Sal to leave Terry – a Mexican girl he met on a bus ride from Los Angeles. Although Sal presents her as his “girl-soul” (Kerouac, 83), he eventually chooses the road instead of her, going back on the moving playground instead of staying picking cottons in the fields of Sabinal.⁶ In the same way, when Dean lives in San Francisco with Camille and their baby, he presents himself as a frantic dog on a leash channeled by a tyrannical master: “[s]he’s getting worse and worse, man, she cries and makes tantrums, won’t let me out to see Slim Gaillard, gets mad every time I’m late (183). In *Understanding Jack Kerouac*, Matt Theado claims that “[w]omen in American literature frequently represent the imposition of civilizing influences over the frontier-pushing males” (Theado, 59). In the different novels of

⁶ Terry’s hometown, where Sal spends a couple days working in the cotton fields to earn money.

our corpus, it seems indeed that a domestic relationship is considered as a danger, as another social constraint that can only be prevented by the liberating road.

Running away from the sands of time

The characters of the three road novels of the corpus of this master's thesis go on the road to run away from social expectations, from mainstream culture, from restraining mother figures and from liberticidal relationships. Another motive that may be added to the "running away" list could be the fear of adulthood. Indeed, by leaving St. Petersburg, Huckleberry Finn stops time and aborts the transition from childhood to adulthood that his surrounding was trying to shape. In *Leopards in the Temple*, Morris Dickstein supports that hypothesis by arguing that Huckleberry Finn is "determined to avoid growing up" (Dickstein, *Leopards*, 10-11) throughout his adventures. To a certain extent, Sal Paradise also avoids growing up when he decides to start his intrepid journey. Whilst on the road, Sal's academic, matrimonial and professional lives are in suspension, which allows him to go back to an age of frivolity and insouciance. According to Michael Skau in "The Makings of Sal Paradise," "Kerouac's novel documents ... an attempt to regain the charm of youth" (Skau, 160). The triggering element that propels Sal into that time travel machine is Dean Moriarty. The latter is indeed presented by Sal as a "long-lost brother," as a strange childhood remembrance transporting him back into the past:

[S]omehow, in spite of our difference in character, he reminded me of some long-lost brother; the sight of his suffering bony face with the long sideburns and his straining muscular sweating neck made me remember my boyhood in those dye-dumps and swim-holes and riversides of Paterson and the Passaic

(Kerouac, 7)

This western boy looks familiar, reminding Sal of his "cousin-in-law from the Bronx" (17) and making him feel like "having an old friend along" (17). In his article, Michael Skau suggests that Sal and Dean actually aim to be wandering children forever: "To the young, youth is eternal, and they expect to live and to remain young forever, the child's intuitive and instinctive Peter-Pan assumption" (Skau, 161). Like Huckleberry Finn, Sal and Dean somehow are American Peter Pans, restlessly fleeing and flying to Neverland, in order to escape from the merciless sands of time.

More than a Peter Pan syndrome, Sal and Dean's fear of adulthood sometimes also reveals itself to be an anxiety about the end of youth and the inevitable arrival of death. Sal once says that "in the bleakness of the mortal realm," he often experiences "the sensation of death kicking at [his] heels to move on" (Kerouac, 173). Moreover, as Matt Theado notices in *Understanding Jack Kerouac*, Sal Paradise often pays attention to describe himself as a young man during his narration: "[t]he novel presents Sal Paradise as a young man – he describes himself as 'a college boy' several times" (Theado, 59). Age seems to matter on the road. The subject is besides often discussed by Sal and Dean, obviously worried about the end of their own road: "We know life, Sal, we're growing older, each of us, little by little" (Kerouac, 187) Dean says to Sal. Sal being older than Dean, age sometimes even engenders arguments between the two travellers: "Who's old! I'm not much older than you are! ... you're always making cracks about my age" (213). Aging definitely matters on the road and one could be allowed to say that the fear of the passing of time is one of the most crucial topics of the novel. When Sal is back to New York City, he tells Carlo Marx an enigmatic dream that reveals again that underlying anguish:

I told him a dream I had about a strange Arabian figure that was pursuing me across the desert; that I tried to avoid; that finally overtook me just before I reached the Protective City. 'Who is this?' said Carlo. We pondered it. I proposed it was myself, wearing a shroud. That wasn't it. Something, someone, some spirit was pursuing all of us across the desert of life and was bound to catch us before we reached heaven. Naturally, now that I look back on it, this is only death: death will overtake us before heaven

(Kerouac, 124)

Time is an essential character in American road literature. It is the only one that can remind the wanderer about the limits of his liberty. Perhaps it is that same anxiety about the unstoppable time that led Chris McCandless – who has always been "stirred by the dark mystery of mortality" (Krakauer, 155) – to get rid of his watch. Perhaps time is the traveller's worst pursuer, for unlike civilization, school, parents or women, it never abandons the race.

Becoming a *super tramp* to confront civilization

If going away can be seen as an escape, it may also be considered as a resistance against a mainstream and dominant culture. In the three novels of the corpus of this master's thesis, the protagonists intentionally opt for a less comfortable way of life, getting rid of their proper

civilization in order to reach freedom. One may say that Huck, Sal, Dean and Chris all chose to become hobos. The idea of wearing dirty clothes, of lacking money and of wandering around without direction does not seem to displease them at all. On the contrary, being a hobo, being ragged and on the fringe of society is actually associated to freedom and heroism by the protagonists of these three novels. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck only feels at peace when he does not have a home and when he is wearing his old and comfortable rags. The young boy who already enjoyed playing the robber with Tom Sawyer is even more excited when he realizes that his life on the raft will be a life of roving, gleaning and stealing:

I can stop anywhere I want to. Jackson's Island is good enough for me; I know that island pretty well, and nobody ever comes there. And then I can paddle over to town nights, and slink around and pick up things I want.

(Twain, 41)

As for Chris McCandless, the young man decides to name himself "Supertramp" at the beginning of his journey, thus provocatively giving a heroic dimension to the marginal figure of the hobo. Chris embraces vagrancy, "[savors] the intermittent company of other vagabonds he [meets] along the way" (Krakauer, 29) and enjoys living "on the streets with bums, tramps, and winos for several weeks" (37). By getting rid of all his money and valuable goods, the young man lowers himself to the bottom of the social scale and idealizes the unstable life of vagabondage:

[W]hen I looked out the window I suddenly saw an SP freight going by with hundreds of hobos reclining on the flatcars and rolling merrily along with packs for pillows and funny papers before their noses 'Damn' I yelled. 'Hooee! It is the promised land'

(Krakauer, 91)

"I'm a hobo now!" (53) exclaims Alexander Supertramp. Living amongst the tramps surprisingly is a dream, Chris's American dream.

Such glamorization of the tramp's way of life can also be found in Jack Kerouac's novel. As Cresswell explains in "Mobility as Resistance: A Geographical Reading of Kerouac's *On the Road*," "[t]he people Kerouac describes with the most passion are the very ones society does it best to ignore: the junkies, the dropouts and the hobos" (Cresswell, 255). A clear illustration of the novel's adulation for vagrancy can be found in the episode where Sal Paradise recalls the story of William Holmes Hazard. In that recollected memory, the

figure of the hobo is again incongruously romanticized, being presented by a little child as a dreamed style of life rather than as a tragic destiny:

Hazard, William Holmes Hazard, ... was hobo by choice. As a little boy he'd seen a hobo come up to ask his mother for a piece of pie, and she had given it to him, and when the hobo went off down the road the little boy had said, "Ma, what is that fellow?" "Why. that's a hobo." "Ma, I want to be a hobo someday." "Shut your mouth, that's not for the like of the Hazards." But he never forgot that day, and when he grew up, after a short spell playing football at LSU, he did become a hobo.

(Kerouac, 26)

As it was already mentioned, Sal Paradise undertakes his journey and decides to adopt a life of vagrancy in order to be freed from the intellectual world of his New York campus. This initial situation may recall an episode from John Dos Passos's *Streets of Night*. In this novel published in 1923, Wenny, a Harvard student, wanders in a park after having had a fight with his father who "always wanted [him] to be workin' to support the family an' all that" (Dos Passos, 86). In that deserted park, Wenny meets Whitey, a tramp whose name may recall the one of a romantic poet already mentioned in this paper. The discussion between Wenny and Whitey will disturb and challenge the college man's conception of life. He will start wandering why he could not "be like Whitey" (89) and whether a life of mobility and vagrancy could not be the way to reach happiness: "Why couldn't I do that, bum from town to town?" (88). As Wenny met Whitey, Sal met Dean Moriarty, the son of a tramp who realized his foolish dream of becoming a hobo.

It can be noticed that Dean is the one who glamorizes the most the figure of the hobo in Kerouac's novel. The young man never stops delivering epic tales about the life of his father, who disappeared "for months" in "the hobo jungle" (Kerouac, 140) and enjoyed himself singing "Hallelujah, I'm a bum, bum again" (208). That latter American folk song actually truly exists and directly inspired the title of Floyd Dell's 1926 short story: "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum." Floyd Dell's work is another example of an American literary work openly embracing the glamorization of the hobo figure. "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum" tells the story of Jasper Weeds, a desperate laborer who finds freedom by suddenly deciding to become a tramp:

When I was cooped up in that factory as a kid, I hated and loathed work . . . But when I hit the road I found that I didn't have to work unless I wanted to. I could live without working, and just about as well as I had lived before. Yes, I went hungry sometimes, and I took my life in my hands every time I hopped a freight; but I didn't mind that. I was free.

(Dell, 159)

In “The Tramp in American Literature, 1873–1939,” Christine Photinos says that in Floyd Dell’s “Hallelujah, I’m a Bum,” “the figure of the tramp represents an escape from modern socioeconomic strictures” (Photinos, 4). “I was free” (Dell, 159) declares Jasper Weeds, just the way Huck Finn claims to be “free and satisfied” (Twain, 11) when he puts back his old rags at the very beginning of his adventures. For Jasper, Whitey, Huck, Sal, Dean and Chris, being on the fringe is being free. The prospect of an uncomfortable life of vagrancy goes hand in hand with the dream of freedom and challenges the conventional American dream.

According to the hobo-like protagonists of American road literature, moving is an opportunity to question dominant culture, to look for different styles of life, for alternative systems that could replace the one they initially fled from. The decision to escape from inevitably implies a criticism of society. It is that connection between escape, rejection and criticism that gives to the genre of American road literature its strong potential for social protest. In *Romance of the Road*, Ronald Primeau claims that “[i]n some ways, all road trips are protests” (Primeau, 33):

In some ways, all road trips are protests. People leave home to change the scene, to overcome being defined by custom, tradition, and circumstances back home, and – at least for a while – to construct an alternative way of living. Time on the road creates opportunities to question the existing social order and explore values that run counter to what is dominant in the culture.

(Primeau, 33)

By escaping from civilization and going on the road, the wanderers embrace that potential for social protest. They travel the country with only the strict minimum, insolently challenging the insatiable consumerism of society.

In *Into the Wild*, Chris McCandless’s departure has a clear motive for provocation and social protest. Going on the road is a way for the recently graduated young man to both reject and defy the American civilization of the 20th century. By abandoning his house, his family, his comfort, his friends and his money, Chris thumbs his nose at his predestined existence and at what he calls himself this conditioned “life of security, conformity, and conservatism” (Krakauer, 57). Disgusted by the capitalist America he was born in, the brilliant alumnus chooses the road as a means of defiance. As Krakauer claims, Chris is “an ideologue who [expresses] nothing but contempt for the bourgeois trappings of mainstream America” (39). He is an insurgent who denigrates the imposed and generally accepted consumerism that defines the capitalist American society; the one that forces him to wear socks, the one that

makes his parents want to buy him a new car in order to replace the old and decent one he already possesses:

I've told them a million times that I have the best car in the world, a car that has spanned the continent from Miami to Alaska ... a car that I will never trade in, a car that I am very strongly attached to.

(Krakauer, 21)

Breaking the rules of the game of capitalism clearly is at the origin of Chris's odyssey. Indeed, vanishing into the wilderness without notice challenges the scheme of the controlling civilization. By mysteriously disappearing, Chris rejects the rules, abandons the civilized board game and allows himself to perform his "duty of civil disobedience" (28):

[A]s a latter-day adherent of Henry David Thoreau, he took as gospel the essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" and thus considered it his moral responsibility to flout the laws of the state.

(Krakauer, 28)

Throughout his adventure, Chris repeatedly defies law and claims to choose individualistic freedom instead of collective regulation: "A 'hunting license'? Hell, no ... How I feed myself is none of the government's business. Fuck their stupid rules" (6). It is following that same provocative ideology that the young man decides to start his adventure without any money, giving "the entire balance of a twenty-four-thousand-dollar saving account to charity, [abandoning] his car and most of his possessions, [burning] all the cash in his wallet" (i). By choosing nature instead of civilization, Chris McCandless also impertinently puts aside the economic, technologic and urban development that formed the United States of America for the last centuries. Like the many other intrepid adventurers that Jon Krakauer introduces in *Into the Wild*,⁷ Chris uses the wild road to go back to a dreamed state of simplicity and purity, only ruled by movement and liberty.

⁷ In order to give more resonance to Chris McCandless's adventure and ideology, Jon Krakauer mixes Chris's story with several other tales of journeys into the wild. Thus are told the intrepid voyages of Gene Rosellini, John Mallon Waterman, Everett Ruess, as well as the one of the young Jon Krakauer himself. Although these men are not related to each other, they all look alike and seem to coexist on the road against mainstream civilization. Jon Krakauer tells the tragic expedition of Gene Rosellini, who was – just like Chris McCandless – "a good athlete" (Krakauer, 73), "a brilliant student" (73) and was coming from a financially secure position. However, just like Chris, Rosellini was also a militant, viscerally opposed to the comfort of his civilization. He was "convinced that humans had devolved into progressively inferior beings [and wanted to see] if it was possible to be independent of modern technology [and] to return to a natural state" (74). Krakauer underlines again that same attitude of defiance towards civilization while telling the story of John Mallon Waterman who "wanted to underscore the waste and immorality of the standard American diet" (78) while going on climbing expeditions with the minimum amount of food possible.

It can be noticed that Chris does not content himself with leaving his home and trying to escape from civilization. More than a lonesome traveler, the young man sometimes also acts as a perspicacious converter. Just like Dean Moriarty who convinces Sal to go back on the American highway every time he comes across him, and just like Walt Whitman who invites his reader to go on the open road – “Allons! whoever you are come travel with me!” (Whitman, 131) –, Chris McCandless encourages the people he meets during his journey to abandon their comfortable life and to get lost into a travelling adventure. Chris’s letter to his friend Ron is a clear example of the young man’s will to convert the rest of the world to a life of vagrancy:

[M]ake a radical change in your lifestyle and begin to boldly do things which you may previously never have thought of doing, or been too hesitant to attempt. So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservation, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future. The very basic core of a man's living spirit is his passion for adventure. ... If you want to get more out of life, you must lose your inclination for monotonous security and adopt a helter-skelter style of life that will at first appear to you to be crazy.

(Krakauer, 57)

Chris’s odyssey is more than a personal flight and experience throughout the American territory. It is a march inviting anyone to defy his or her normative and predefined destiny. It is a campaign conveying a challenging ideology. It is a pacific crusade against the superficiality and predictability of modern society.

Protesting through wandering, proposing a different American Dream

In *On the Road*, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty undertake a directionless journey and thus challenge the teleological road taken by mainstream society. Drastically opposed to the “life of security, conformity, and conservatism” (Krakauer, 57) that Chris McCandless flees from in *Into the Wild*, Sal and Dean aimlessly wander, focusing on individual freedom and sexual liberation, always giving priority to the present rather than to the future. It is a life of emotion and compulsion, an unpredictable existence where only immediate desire prevails:

Dean just raced in society, eager for bread and love; he didn't care one way or the other, "so long's I can get that lil ole gal with that lil sumpin down there tween her legs, boy," and "so long's we can eat, son, y'ear me? I'm hungry, I'm starving, let's eat right now!"

(Kerouac, 8)

The frenzy and aimless trajectory of Sal and Dean's journey is the strongest form of social protest that appears in the novel. It constantly challenges the normative stability, the established and constructed life of those who – as Old Bull Lee says – “go on working and punching time clocks and organizing themselves into sullen unions” (Kerouac, 149).⁸ As Cresswell suggests in his article: “disorder and randomness as undirected mobility are central to Jack Kerouac's novel and ... these themes represent part of the revolt” (Cresswell, 254). Indeed, like Chris McCandless who gets rid of his money to break the rules of the capitalist economy, Sal and Dean use randomness, fuzziness and disorder to challenge the dream of a perfectly organized future. They randomly cruise without a real destination and therefore disrupt the American dream of a secure and successful future at the end of the road.

On the Road conveys a strong criticism of the American dream throughout its narration and cannot be detached from the tradition of protest literature. Like many other literary critics, Ann Charters highlights Sal and Dean's constant test of the American dream in her introduction to Jack Kerouac's novel: “*On the Road* can be read as a quest taken by Sal Paradise, who sets out to test the American dream” (Charters, xxi). It can indeed be noticed that as soon as Sal stops his frenetic movement and goes back to New York City, the magic of the road vanishes and is replaced by a sad spectacle. In the frenzy of Time Square's rush hour, what Sal Paradise calls the “mad dream” (Kerouac, 107) becomes apparent again:

Suddenly I found myself on Times Square. I had traveled eight thousand miles around the American continent and I was back on Times Square; and right in the middle of a rush hour, too, seeing with my innocent road-eyes the absolute madness and fantastic hoorair of New York with its millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves, the mad dream - grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City.

(Kerouac, 107)

The description of this dramatic and cyclic pattern consisting of “grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying” (107) is a clear criticism of the American dream. Time Square's “mad dream” is nothing but Sal and Dean's worst nightmare.

⁸ In *Into the Wild*, Chris McCandless also refers to those “plastic people” (Krakauer, 43) who spend their lives “punching a clock” (43).

Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty often claim to live their life without trying to realize any dream. They do not worry about their future and do not try to grab or to take anything except from the raw experiences of the road. Preparing himself before going to Mexico, Sal even claims: “I was having a wonderful time and the whole world opened up before me because I had no dreams” (Kerouac, 258.). However, this statement is repeatedly contradicted during the novel, for dreaming is one of the most discussed topics by the two travellers. When Sal is delirious, suffering from dysentery at the very end of his Mexican adventure, he paradoxically concludes his life on the road by saying that he “had all dreams” (301):

Then I got fever and became delirious and unconscious. Dysentery. I looked up out of the dark swirl of my mind and I knew I was on a bed eight thousand feet above sea level, on a roof of the world, and I knew that I had lived a whole life and many others in the poor atomistic husk of my flesh, and I had all the dreams.

(Kerouac, 301)

Sal and Dean indeed have their own crazy dreams, hobo’s fantasies that do not match at all the civilized ideals of American society. The two men “dream[...] of Frisco jazz and ... Mexican mambo to come” (270). They are appealed to the “dream ... to follow one great red line across America” (11), to the “dreamlike rapidity” (231) of the road, or to the “pornographic hasheesh daydream in heaven” (289) they experience in Mexico. The word “dream” – which appears more than a hundred times during the narration – is a crucial element of *On the Road*, for it covers and gathers two opposite ideologies, restlessly struggling against each other throughout Sal and Dean’s American journey.

Sal and Dean live a hedonist life governed by the unpredictable rhythm of the road. By contrast, while they are doing so, the other American citizens, the one who are constricted in the mad dream of a secure and sedentary future, are pathetically “counting the miles” (Kerouac, 209):

They have worries, they’re counting the miles, they’re thinking about where to sleep tonight, how much money for gas, the weather, how they’ll get there - and all the time they’ll get there anyway, you see. ... [H]e mimicked, “I don’t know - maybe we shouldn’t get gas in that station. I read recently in National Petroffious Petroleum News that this kind of gas has a great deal of O-Octane gook in it and someone once told me it even had semi-official high-frequency cock in it, and I don’t know, well I just don’t feel like it anyway . . .” Man, you dig all this.

(Kerouac, 209-210)

Sal and Dean’s general detachment and insouciance drastically contrasts with the worries of mainstream society. The two wanderers mock other people’s routine. More than that, they

cannot stand it. In between two road trips, Sal goes back to his aunt's house, spending Christmas in the company of his "Southern relatives." That short and motionless episode – summarizing up the discussion of the members of the family – highlights again the boredom of the sedentary life that Sal and Dean are constantly trying to escape from:

One day when all our Southern relatives were sitting around the parlor in Testament, gaunt men and women with the old Southern soil in their eyes, talking in low, whining voices about the weather, the crops, and the general weary recapitulation of who had a baby, who got a new house, and so on, a mud-spattered '49 Hudson drew up in front of the house on the dirt road.

(Kerouac, 109)

In that '49 Hudson comes Dean Moriarty, the embodiment of the aimless movement that will once again save Sal Paradise from the boring and organized life off the road. In *Romance of the Road*, Ronald Primeau presents Dean as a "redeemer [who] freed Sal to be himself, taught him the requisite of madness, and helped him formulate his paradoxical combination of optimism and social protest (Primeau, 43). Dean is the way out, the key to escape and to protest. As Matt Theado suggests in *Understanding Jack Kerouac*:

Dean represents possibilities, open-ended adventure, an escape from the decadence of Sal's sullen hipster friends in New York City. Dean offers a sunlit future, a positive force, a chance to be a man in the great western sense of cowboys and frontiersmen.

(Theado, 61)

Dean Moriarty is the cowboy that Sal's aunt despises and considers to be mad. He is the embodiment of movement, frenzy and disorder that will allow Sal to flee from the established and conventional American dream broadcasted in those Christmas dinners.

Vanishing as an American citizen

"Because he had been carrying no identification, the authorities didn't know who he was, where he was from, or why he was there" (Krakauer, 14) For Chris McCandless, protesting equals abandoning life in community to become a drifter, but it also mean disappearing as an American citizen. When Chris leaves Gallien at the entry of the Stampede trail, he has already abandoned all his "unnecessary" belongings and goes as far as giving him "his watch, his comb, and ... all his money: eighty-five cents in loose change" (7). In the wild, the rest of humanity does not count anymore and isolation becomes the target, the final motive of Chris McCandless's journey. Like Sal Paradise who "want[s] to ... sneak out into the night and

disappear somewhere” (Kerouac, 67), Chris does not “want to see a single person, no airplanes, no sign of civilization” (Krakauer, 159). He wants to be alone, preferring nothingness to civilization. “I think I’m going to disappear for a while” (21), said the young man to his parents a couple of days before his departure. Chris McCandless did indeed progressively disappear throughout his adventure, cutting himself from civilization, from time and space; finding refuge in an extemporal wilderness. “I don’t want to know what time it is or where I am. None of that matters” (7) says the wanderer to Gallien who will be the last man he will ever speak to.

By breaking to the extreme the major rules of the capitalist world, Chris consciously makes himself vanish, becoming a marginal wanderer whose presence does not count anymore in the marketable world of the 20th century. He becomes a nowhere man, rejecting his former name and identity and refusing to be indexed in any kind of official list. When he has to fill out a W-4 form during his odyssey, the young man insolently falsifies his identity, breaking the rules of the civilized game and refusing to be associated to any code or to any number:

Across the top of the first one, dating from McCandless's initial visit to Carthage, in 1990, he had scrawled “EXEMPT EXEMPT EXEMPT EXEMPT” and given his name as Iris Fucyu. Address: “None of your damn business.” Social Security number: “I forget.”

(Krakauer, 101)

Throughout his journey, McCandless’s constantly tries to escape from the grips of civilization. As mentioned before, to “symbolize the complete severance from his previous life, he even [adopts] a new name” (23), and therefore literally vanishes as Chris McCandless: “No longer would he answer to Chris McCandless; he was now Alexander Supertramp, master of his own identity” (23).⁹ “[P]oisoned by civilization” (163), the wanderer destroys his identity, vanishes into the wild and becomes a super tramp. When Chris was picked up by Gallien on his way to Anchorage, he only introduced himself as Alex. ““Alex?” Gallien responded, fishing for a last name. “Just Alex,” the young man replied, pointedly rejecting the bait” (4). Although Chris’s decision to change his birth name can certainly be associated to this violent rejection of the categorization of civilization, it may also suggest a more

⁹ It can be noticed that like Chris McCandless, Everett Ruess – another adventurer whose story is told by Krakauer in *Into the Wild* – “adopted a new name or, rather, a series of new names” (Krakauer, 93) during his journey. He indeed renamed himself “Lan Rameau,” “Evert Rulan” and “Nemo” – which means “nobody” in Latin.

symbolical kind of disownment. Abandoning a family name may also imply a will to be freed from the heritage of an oppressive past generation.

Running away from a family name

As it was said, going on the road is a way for the wanderers of the three novels of this corpus to rebuff and confront a suffocating civilization. It can be suggested that this violent isolation from society often goes hand in hand with a rejection of a past generation. In *Into the Wild*, the reader progressively discovers how Chris McCandless's flight can be associated to an act of rebellion against his parents. The more Krakauer's investigation advances, the more it becomes clear how Chris's family played a role in his feeling of oppression. As his friend Westerberg testifies, "[f]rom things he said, you could tell something wasn't right between him and his family" (Krakauer, 18). The reader then learns that "Chris complained to [his sister] Carine that their parents' behavior was 'so irrational, so oppressive, disrespectful and insulting that [he] finally passed [his] breaking point'" (64). Many details of the text suggest that this journey into the wild was a way for Chris McCandless to run away from his parents, from his education and especially from his father. As Westerberg says again: "[k]nowing Alex, I think he must have just got stuck on something that happened between him and his dad and couldn't leave it be" (64). The tension between Chris and his father is omnipresent from the beginning of the narration. Already in the author's notes introducing the novel, Jon Krakauer mentions "the complicated, highly charged bond that exists between fathers and sons" (i).¹⁰

By discovering more and more about Chris McCandless's past and history, the reader progressively perceives a link between the young man's rage against capitalism and his tumultuous relationship with his father:

Not infrequently during their visits, Franz recalls, McCandless's face would darken with anger and he'd fulminate about his parents or politicians or the endemic idiocy

¹⁰ During a long section of *Into the Wild*, Jon Krakauer builds a bridge between Chris McCandless's tragedy and elements of his personal history. One of the parallels between the two life stories is the relationship between an irrational desire for adventure and a need for emancipation from an oppressive father. Krakauer describes his father as "volatile" (Krakauer, 147) person who extended his "aspirations ... to his progeny" (147). He then confides to the reader that as a child and adolescent, he "felt oppressed by [his] old man expectations" (148). Like Chris McCandless, Krakauer violently broke with his progenitor, refused to be "mold ... in his image" (150), to become "a clone of [his] father. As a young man, he therefore defied his father, abandoned the medical area, hit the road and consecrated his life to physical and sportive activities. In both stories, paternal pressure led to wild adventure.

of mainstream American life.

(Krakauer, 52)

Walt McCandless is intrinsically linked to the American capitalism that Chris judges despicable. He works for the NASA and embodies the world of technology, innovation and globalization. Whereas Chris abandons his watch, “[heads] west without an itinerary” (22) and attempts to lose himself into the wild, his father is a “NASA's project manager” (104), “an eminent aerospace engineer who designed advanced radar system for the space shuttle and other high-profile projects” (19). The contrast is meaningful. Besides, it can be noticed that Gaylord Stuckey – “a ham-faced sixty-three-year-old Hoosier” (158) that Chris encounters during his adventure – highlights that radical opposition between Chris’s ideology and the profession of his father:

[Chris] didn't get along with his folks too good, I guess. Told me his dad was a genius, a NASA rocket scientist, but he'd been a bigamist at one time—and that kind of went against Alex's grain.

(Krakauer, 159)

Walt McCandless embodies the modern civilization that Chris spurns. The young man wrote “ALEX” at the left end (51) of the belt he made by hand for himself. Just next to that newfound name, he inscribed “the initials C. J. M. (for Christopher Johnson McCandless),” framing “a skull and crossbones” (51). By assuming death for his birth name and by becoming Alexander Supertramp, Chris both vanished as an American citizen and as the son of his father.

Throwing away an heritage

By looking closer at the investigation delivered in Jon Krakauer’s *Into the Wild*, it can be noticed that father and son have not always been radical antagonists and that Chris actually shared a lot with his father before vanishing on the American road. There seems to be a strong identical conflict at the origin of Chris’s odyssey. As Krakauer suggests after having interviewed the McCandless family: “[p]erhaps the greatest paradox concerned [Chris’s] feelings about money” (Krakauer, 115). The young man who became a hobo after college previously embraced the heritage of his father and was, as his mother testifies, “always an entrepreneur. ... Always” (115). As she recalls, at eight years old, Chris “grew vegetables behind the house in Annandale and then sold them door-to-door around the neighborhood”

(115). When he was twelve years old, “he printed up a stack of flyers and started a neighborhood copy business” (116). At the age of seventeen, the young man was “hired by a local building contractor to canvass neighborhoods for sales ... [a]nd he was astonishingly successful, a salesman without peer” (116). Billie McCandless’s testimony disrupts Chris’s image as a pure anti-capitalist, surprisingly revealing the young rebel’s talent for business and the intense passion he had for money before deciding to burn it all:

He made a pile of money. I remember he'd come home every night and do his accounting at the kitchen table. It didn't matter how tired he was; he'd figure out how many miles he drove, how much Domino's paid him for gas, how much gas actually cost, his net profits for the evening, how it compared to the same evening the week before.

(Krakauer, 120)

Chris’s journey as Alexander Supertramp may therefore be read as an attempt to find freedom, to detach and liberate himself from the hold of his paternal inheritance. By choosing Walt Whitman instead of Walt McCandless as a spiritual father, by abandoning his birth name and by becoming a Supertramp, Chris erased a part of his former life and asserted his will to be freed from a capitalist inheritance. It can be noticed that “when Chris applied for the McDonald's job, he presented himself as Chris McCandless, not as Alex” (40). “McCandless” is a cover. It is Alex’s name as an American citizen, as a McDonald’s employer and as the son of his father. It is a disowned birth name that was left off the road and that progressively faded out during the young man’s renaissance into the wild.

Another character from the corpus of this master’s thesis changed his name during his odyssey. Huckleberry Finn adopted a long series of fake names during his adventures in order to conceal his identity. One may say that like in *Into the Wild*, there is a relation between the flight from civilization and a desire to be freed from the inheritance of a father in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Just as Chris, Huck has a lot in common with his father, and just as Chris, his journey can be interpreted as a liberating expedition to get rid of a paternal influence. Pap’s hold on Huckleberry actually is even stronger than Walt’s influence on Chris. Indeed, Huck does not have any other masculine model apart from his old father who sleeps with the hogs and uses the little money he has to get drunk. Pap is Huck’s unique point of reference, the only landmark left to the motherless child to find his way. In his critical work on Mark Twain’s novel, Harold Beaver argues that “Huck is a chip off the old block. To understand Huck one must begin with Pap” (Beaver, 79). Pap is indeed Huck’s *beginning*. He is the boy’s pedigree, the only link he still has with his origins. As Harold Beaver notices,

everything Huckleberry knows comes from his father: “[i]t was from Pap that Huck learnt this aggressive verbal energy as well as his facility for spinning tall yarns” (Beaver, 81). It’s Pap again who “taught [him] the advantages of falsehood” (Erskine, 300), the magic of lies and the art of “borrowing.” Huck has assimilated all these tricks from early childhood and never had any reason to question them. As Pap’s son, he therefore unconsciously follows the same road as his father, frequently quoting the old master to justify his vandalism:

Mornings before daylight I slipped into cornfields and borrowed a watermelon, or a mushmelon, or a punkin, or some new corn, or things of that kind. Pap always said it warn’t no harm to borrow things if you was meaning to pay them back some time; but the widow said it warn’t anything but a soft name for stealing, and no decent body would do it.

(Twain, 70)

As well as a model on “borrowing,” Pap remains for his son an “authority on superstition” (Pitofsky, 65). With his “cross in [his] left boot-heel made with big nails to keep off the devil” (Twain, 24), old Finn perfectly fits the archetype of the old South, of an age of superstition ruled by the oral tradition. Huck does not only embrace the beliefs of his father, he also welcomes the social prejudices emanating from each of his drunken speeches. Michael Lackey writes in “Beyond Good and Evil: Huckleberry Finn on Human Intimacy” that “Huck is the socialized product of Pap, a man who passionately supports laws that degrade African Americans” (Lackey Michael, 499). Racism is indeed another part of Huckleberry’s heritage. Born in the age of slavery, the boy “has assimilated Pap’s social prejudices” (Beaver, 81), after having spent his whole childhood listening to tirades on the inferiority of black people:

It was ‘lection day, and I was just about to go and vote myself if I warn’t too drunk to get there; but when they told me there was a State in this country where they’d let that nigger vote, I drew out. I says I’ll never vote agin. ... They call that a govment that can’t sell a free nigger till he’s been in the State six months.

(Twain, 35)

Pap’s hold on Huckleberry Finn is undeniable. Although the old man is described by his son as a violent and pathetic animal from the beginning of the novel, his hold on Huck persistently underlies throughout the narration.

It seems that by having Pap as only model, Huckleberry cannot escape from following in his father’s footsteps. At the beginning of the novel, the reader yet discovers Huckleberry without his father, supervised by people trying to prevent him from “[becoming] another Pap” (Bellamy, 23). He is now an adopted son, a boy giving up his old rags and learning how to

read and write. The Widow Douglas makes him attend school, teaches him religion and explains to him the proprieties of society. Even though the transition is difficult, Huckleberry admits at the beginning of Chapter IV that he progressively gets used to this new way of life:

At first I hated the school, but by and by I got so I could stand it. ... [T]he longer I went to school the easier it got to be. I was getting sort of used to the widow's ways, too, and they warn't so raspy on me. Living in a house and sleeping in a bed pulled on me pretty tight mostly, but before the cold weather I used to slide out and sleep in the woods sometimes, and so that was a rest to me. I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too, a little bit.

(Twain, 24)

Just after this passage, Huckleberry notices footprints in the snow, with the form of “a cross in the left boot-heel” (24). The boy immediately recognizes the tracks of his old father, these footsteps that he is so afraid to follow yet they keep coming his way. In spite of his efforts to keep off his own devil, Huckleberry finds himself face to face with his father at the end of chapter IV. In the middle of the night, Pap suddenly appears to remind the boy where he comes from, thus challenging all the “new ways” he started to assimilate. As Pap tells Huck, he remains “boss of his son” (30). Whether he wants it or not, the boy comes from his father and cannot become “a good deal of a big-bug” (27), “a sweet-scented dandy” with a “bed; and bedclothes; and a look'n'-glass; and a piece of carpet on the floor” (28). He will always remain a Finn and can only have one school, the one he inherits from his family:

You're educated, too, they say—can read and write. You think you're better'n your father, now, don't you, because he can't? ... [Y]ou drop that school, you hear? I'll learn people to bring up a boy to put on airs over his own father and let on to be better'n what HE is. You lemme catch you fooling around that school again, you hear? Your mother couldn't read, and she couldn't write, nuther, before she died. None of the family couldn't before *they* died. I can't; and here you're a-swelling yourself up like this.

(Twain, 27-28)

Whereas Pap proves in chapter V – ironically entitled “Pap Starts in on a New Life” – that no one can change a Finn, his son keeps on going to school to provoke his father: “I didn't want to go to school much before, but I reckoned I'd go now to spite pap” (31). The old man will then decide to kidnap Huckleberry, taking him off into the woods and confining him in a secluded cabin on the Illinois shore. Ronald Dorris explains in “Paternal Relationship in Huckleberry Finn” that this abduction and sequestration is a way for Pap to prevent Huckleberry from creating “a generation gap between fathers and sons” (Dorris, 57):

Too much for some and too little for others is moving too quickly in Pap's estimation. His actions imply that this will do nothing other than give way to a generation gap between fathers and sons. His attempt to prevent such a catastrophe comes in the form of kidnapping his son.

(Dorris, 57)

In the woods, son and father start again their old routine, assuming their roles of outsiders excluded from civilization. As time goes by, Huckleberry progressively remembers how pleasant is the marginal life of his father, far away from good manners and social obligations. He recovers his old rags and is finally allowed to smoke his pipe in the fresh air of the wilderness.

It was kind of lazy and jolly, laying off comfortable all day, smoking and fishing, and no books nor study. Two months or more run along, and my clothes got to be all rags and dirt, and I didn't see how I'd ever got to like it so well at the widow's, where you had to wash, and eat on a plate, and comb up, and go to bed and get up regular, and be forever bothering over a book, and have old Miss Watson pecking at you all the time. I didn't want to go back no more.

(Twain, 32)

However, living in Pap's cabin also means getting back to the unbearable violence of his alcoholic father. Even if Huckleberry accepts – not to say enjoys – the rags, the lies, the “borrowing” and the superstition of his paternal heritage, he cannot stand its violence: “I couldn't stand it. I was all over welts ... I made up my mind I would fix up some way to leave there” (32). In chapter VII – “I Fool Pap and Get Away” – Huckleberry decides to run away and leave his old father for good.

Killing the father

In *Into the Wild*, Chris McCandless vanishes as Walt's son by changing his name and by abandoning civilization. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck Finn goes even further by symbolically killing both himself and his father. As James Cox claims in “Remarks on the Sad Initiation of Huckleberry Finn,” the “fake murder is probably the most vital and crucial incident in the entire novel” (Cox, 395). When Huckleberry escapes from Pap's cabin, he decides to disguise his flight into a murder-robbery scene. The boy spreads the blood of a “wild pig” (Twain, 40) on the dirt floor, smashes the door with an axe and takes with him all the valuable things of the dwelling. By escaping from the cabin and by staging his own murder, Huckleberry irrevocably breaks a bond – not to say cut the cord – between himself

and his father. To a certain extent, he condemns Pap's son to death, leaving behind him his birth name and identity. As Stuart Hutchinson argues in his "General Introduction" to Mark Twain's novel, "Huck's elaborate faking of his own death, when he escapes from pap, indicates the extremity of his desire to be rid of his identity as pap's son" (Hutchinson, xv). Some literary critics – such as Lynn, Beaver, or Pitofsky – go as far as to say that by using a wild pig to fake his own death, Huck is symbolically killing his own father:

[T]his act has a double meaning, which emerges only when we recall Pap Finn's notorious habit of lying drunk amongst the hogs in the tanyard, as well as the drunkard's slobberingly self-pitying identification of himself with his sleeping companions: "There's the hand that was the hand of a hog." Huck's slaughter of the pig not only symbolizes his desire to end his own miserable life but to slay his father and the sordid animality of his ways.

(Lynn, 211)

The use of pig's blood to fake Finn's blood is not that arbitrary. Hogs have been mentioned on several occasions since the beginning of the novel, each time in association to Pap's character. As Harold Beaver writes in his critical work on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, "[i]t was Pap who debased himself to the level of hogs. So that when Huck actually kills a wild hog, it seems like the most brutal Oedipal act" (Beaver, 84). Harold Beaver probably did not realize how accurate was his comparison between the legend of Oedipus and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. As in the Greek myth, the parricide of Twain's novel has been predicted. It is Pap who calls his son "the Angel of Death" (Twain, 36) in his prophetic drunken madness. Just as King Laius – who is known to have fathered Oedipus while being drunk¹¹ –, Pap wishes to ward off danger by trying to make his son disappear. In the chapter entitled "Pap Struggles with the Death Angel," the drunken father thus threatens Huckleberry with a knife, chasing him around the cabin:

"Tramp—tramp—tramp; that's the dead; tramp—tramp—tramp; they're coming after me; but I won't go. Oh, they're here! don't touch me—don't! hands off—they're cold; let go. Oh, let a poor devil alone!" ... He chased me round and round the place with a clasp-knife, calling me the Angel of Death, and saying he would kill me, and then I couldn't come for him no more.

(Twain, 36)

¹¹ "The oracle had warned [Laius] not to beget a son, for the son that should be begotten would kill his father; nevertheless, flushed with wine, he had intercourse with his wife" (Apollodorus, 105).

Huckleberry Finn is indeed Pap's "Angel of Death." When he slays the hog and escapes from the cabin, the boy condemns his father to his end.

Running away from a ghost

A couple of days after the evasion, Pap is dead, his body abandoned in a house floating on the Mississippi river. However, neither the boy nor the reader will find out the identity of the corpse until the end of the novel. When Huck wants to talk about the dead body the day after its discovery, Jim refuses, warning him that the unburied body might decide on haunting them forever:

[Jim] said it would fetch bad luck; and besides, he said, he might come and ha'nt us; he said a man that warn't buried was more likely to go a-ha'nting around than one that was planted and comfortable.

(Twain, 58)

The unburied father will indeed continue haunting his son all the way down the Mississippi river. As explained earlier, Huckleberry will keep quoting Pap as an authority and will frequently mention him in order to warrant his inappropriate behavior. Moreover, it can be noticed that characters such as the king and the duke may be seen as Pap's living ghosts by the way they remember the old man's greediness and dishonesty. As Jeanne Campbell Reesman writes in "Bad Fathering in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*," the two charlatans are "both pap-figures of irresponsibility and greed" (Reesman, 178). In "You Can't Go Home Again," Kenneth S. Lynn highlights that "the King is the white father, whose moral quality is summed up by Huck's likening him to a hog – the dirty animal that had previously symbolized Pap Finn" (Lynn, 226).¹² Pap – who was already "dead" yet "present" during the four first chapters of the novel – will remain with his son throughout his journey down the river, just as a ghost haunting his murderer. By symbolically killing his father and by escaping from his cabin, Huck didn't completely free himself from Pap's haunting spirit. The boy only engaged a process of salvation that will go on throughout the novel, following the unpredictable movement of the Mississippi river.

¹² Kenneth S. Lynn highlights in one of his footnotes that "the reference to the King as a hog was omitted by Twain from the published version of the novel" (Lynn, 226).

Conclusion – when the escape becomes a quest

In front of a suffocating milieu, of a despicable civilization, of a violent father or of the fatality of mortality, the only answer is to move. In Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the Mississippi boy escapes from his father's cabin and from the Widow Douglas's guardianship, thus abandoning the traumatizing "sivilization" of his childhood. In *On the Road*, Sal Paradise suddenly decides to go west, opting for a random vagrancy instead of the sedentary and comfortable life of mainstream America. In *Into the Wild*, Chris McCandless burns his money, changes his birth name and literally vanishes into the American wilderness, hence defying his predestined future and the will of his parents. The initial situations of these three American road novels revolves around a same feeling of oppression, contracted by civilization and by the influence of the past generations. In these three novels, movement – on the river, on the road or into the wilderness – reveals itself as a last solution. In movement, a man has a chance, an opportunity to find alternatives and to turn his life around. In movement, a man can also protest against a system, challenge a paternal model or/and a mainstream ideology. By analyzing the three road narratives of the corpus considered in this master's thesis, it seems that undertaking a journey is more complex than just going on an adventure. As Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet claim in *Dialogues II*: "[T]o flee is not to renounce action: nothing is more active than a flight. It is to put ... a system to flight as one burst a tube" (Deleuze - Parnet, 36). Moving is a radical break, a disrupting decision allowing escape as well as confrontation and emancipation. Huck, Chris and Sal irreparably cut the ties with their ancient life by adopting the precarious life of vagrancy. However, the narrations of the three novels progressively demonstrate that to truly find emancipation, the runaways cannot only content themselves with abandoning and rejecting their past. Having become nowhere men without fathers, names or identity, the wanderers progressively transform their escapes into quests, trying on new fathers, names, and identities.

Running After

Movement as Search, Pursuit and Salvation

*“Where was Hassel? I dug the square for Hassel;
he wasn’t there, he was in Riker’s Island, behind bars.
Where Dean? Where everybody? Where life?”*

(Kerouac, 107).

As discussed in the first chapter, movement starts as an escape in the three novels of this corpus. It is triggered by, but also used for, rejection and confrontation. However, what comes after that provocative expression of rebellion? How can movement survive and endure the distance with opposition as only motivation? In his travel narrative *The Great Railway Bazaar*, Paul Theroux describes travel as “flight and pursuit in equal parts” (Theroux, 2). It can be noticed that in the three road novels of our corpus, the flight progressively transforms itself into a quest. Whereas the frenzy of rebellion fades out, a series of goals emerge and gradually stand out as the real motors of the initiatory journey. After having abandoned their ancient lives, detached themselves from their parents and confronted the norms imposed by civilization, the confused wanderers use movement to search for new surroundings, for new models or for new systems. The road becomes a place of encounters and discoveries where the travellers are able to test every single thing, place or person they find on their way. Left to their own devices, the ex-runaways also – and perhaps mainly – look for themselves. As Ronald Primeau says in *Romance of the Road*, “Americans lose themselves in their cars as soon as they take to the highways in a quest for self-discovery” (Primeau, 84). The wanderers roam the road to discover who they are, to remember who they were and sometimes to even imagine who they could be. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *On the Road* and *Into the Wild* thus tell the evolution of young individuals growing up on the road, looking for answers and trying to shape their own identity. Freely wandering, they transform the road into a moving stage allowing them to limitlessly perform a series of new lives for themselves. The journey radically changes its function and gradually becomes an attempt for reconstruction. Goals and destinations are defined, muting the aimless escape into a definite search, for surrogates, for personal and national identity, for lost origins, for independence.

Escape, transition and identity confusion

After having left their home and abandoned their identity, Huck, Chris and Sal suddenly

become anonymous men wandering on the open road. It can be suggested that this violent breakup with civilization leads the protagonists to experience a form of identity confusion during their solitary journey. In *Into the Wild*, Chris McCandless decides “to invent an utterly new life for himself” (Krakauer, 23) and shape a second identity for his experience on the road:

To symbolize the complete severance from his previous life, he even adopted a new name. No longer would he answer to Chris McCandless; he was now Alexander Supertramp, master of his own identity.

(Krakauer, 23)

Travelling West, the young man decides to opt for a new name and a new hometown. Whereas Chris McCandless was born in Virginia, Alexander Supertramp claims that “he [is] from South Dakota” (4). The transformation is radical, even though it appears that the travelling rebel occasionally passes from Chris to Alex at the beginning of his journey, sometimes almost living a double life between the randomness of the wilderness and the regulation of civilization. As it was already mentioned before, Chris McCandless curiously took back his birth name when he started working at McDonalds. By looking further at this passage, it can be noticed that during that transitory period, Chris lived in between two identities. At McDonalds, the young man was Chris McCandless, who worked for one of the biggest industries of the capitalist world and who complied with “the rule that employees have to wear appropriate footwear at all times” (40). After work, he was Alexander Supertramp again, alone, free and satisfied, allowed to take off his uniform and his socks. As one of his ex-colleagues remembers: “as soon as his shift was over, bang!—the first thing he'd do [was] peel those socks off” (40). Moreover, the young man did not want to tell his colleagues that he was camping out in the middle of the desert. Chris indeed pretended to have a home somewhere “across the river in Laughlin” (41)

McCandless had tried to disguise the fact that he was a drifter living out of a backpack: He told his fellow employees that he lived across the river in Laughlin. Whenever they offered him a ride home after work, he made excuses and politely declined. In fact, during his first several weeks in Bullhead, McCandless camped out in the desert at the edge of town; then he started squatting in a vacant mobile home.

(Krakauer, 41)

It seems that McCandless and Supertramp coexisted for a while during that pivotal period, that the young adventurer was still trying to shape the transition between his civilized youth and his wild future.

Chris's ambivalence and identity confusion at the beginning of his adventure may recall a similar passage in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. One morning, at the beginning of his journey, Sal Paradise wakes up "halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of [his] youth and the West of [his] future (Kerouac, 15), and declares not knowing who he is for the first time of his life:

I woke up as the sun was reddening; and that was the one distinct time in my life, the strangest moment of all, when I didn't know who I was - I was far away from home, haunted and tired with travel, in a cheap hotel room I'd never seen ... I looked at the cracked high ceiling and really didn't know who I was for about fifteen strange seconds. ... I was halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future.

(Kerouac, 15)

"Sal Paradise is lost" (Primeau, 38) says Ronald Primeau in *Romance of the Road*. East and West embody two sides of the young man's identity, two aspects of his personality struggling against each other. This episode of *On the Road* marks a pivotal moment in Sal's adventure, an instant of transition between two cardinal points, two lifestyles and two identities. A passage in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* may also recall that disoriented awakening described in Kerouac's novel. One morning, at the Grangerford's house, Huckleberry Finn wakes up and realizes that he has forgotten his name: "[I]t was most daylight and everybody went to bed, and I went to bed with Buck, and when I waked up in the morning, drat it all, I had forgot what my name was" (Twain, 102). The similarity of those two situations is striking and furthermore, it emphasizes the parallel between movement and identity confusion. Besides, like Sal's puzzled awakening in the middle of America, Huck's amnesia occurs on the riverbanks of the Mississippi river – which also is a "dividing line" (Kerouac, 15) between the East and the West of the nation. Although uncannily similar, that episode of oblivion in Mark Twain's novel is also significantly different from Sal Paradise's identity confusion in *On the Road*. Whereas Sal is like Chris McCandless, torn between his past and his future, Huck Finn rather is lost between all the fictional names he has adopted during his clandestine journey. In the same way, the boy has indeed already confused "Sarah Williams" for "Mary Williams" in front of Mrs. Judith Loftus. Throughout his travel along the dividing line of America, Huckleberry plays with his own self, free to enact a girl, a boy or even an English

“valley,” sometimes as far as getting lost in the multiplicity of his different characters. In the threshold between several fictional identities, between the moving road and the static civilization, between East and West and between youth and adulthood, the protagonists of the novel of our corpus seem to experience a comparable form of identity confusion. However, the evolution of these three novels demonstrate that even though the wandering men can lose themselves on the road and experience identity dilemmas, they can also progressively reinvent themselves through performance and imagination.

The road is a stage: searching for new identities on the road

Only one letter distinguishes wandering from wondering. In the three novels constituting the literary corpus of this master’s thesis, the American road reveals itself as a place of questioning and self-discovery. Like Chris McCandless who gets on the road “to explore the inner country of his own soul” (Krakauer, 183), Huck Finn and Sal Paradise use movement as a device to rediscover their personality. Thanks to movement, they can indeed freely travel through a world that constantly changes, a mutable environment filled with people that do not know anything about their personal history. In *Blue Highways*, William Least Heat-Moon highlights that the instantaneity of the life on the road constantly disqualifies the past and allows the travellers to enact whoever they want to be during their journey: “When you’re traveling, you are what you are, right there and then. People don’t have your past to hold against you. No yesterdays on the road.” (Heat-Moon, 49). Just as there are no yesterdays on the road, there seems to be no tomorrows. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet back up such a statement in *Dialogues II*, by claiming that “nomads ... have neither past nor future” (Deleuze – Parnet, 38). In *On the Road*, Sal Paradise dwells for a while in the peaceful city of Sabinal, but cannot stand the idea that everything is eventually postponed to “mañana”:

The sun began to get red. Nothing had been accomplished. What was there to accomplish? “Mañana” said Rickey. “Mañana, man, we make it; have another beer, man, dah you go, dab you go!» ... “Sure, baby, mañana.” It was always mañana. For the next week that was all I heard - mañana, a lovely word and one that probably means heaven.

(Kerouac, 93-94)

The road is an extemporal place where only present matters. It therefore progressively unveils itself as a fertile ground for identity questioning, invention and reconstruction. Like a flowing

river constantly renewing itself, it has an ephemeral reality, allowing the wanderer to invent a new present at every stopover. The road is a stage, a place for performance where the wanderers are merely players, allowed to portray as many parts as they want during their journey.

Huckleberry Finn embraces that idea of a never changing present on the road in Mark Twain's novel, performing a new personal history every time he stops his movement. From the moment when he leaves the cabin of his father, the young boy officially dies as Pap's son. He irreparably cuts the ties with his ancient life and is left alone, meandering on the Mississippi river, without father, name or identity. Having become a nowhere man, Huckleberry then starts taking on new names and identities. As Harold Beaver suggests in his book, after having left Pap's cabin, Huckleberry's journey becomes a search for a new self:

Huck dies in his old self as Pap's son in Illinois to confront his new self ... But what self? That is where the real crisis begins. Who is he? His search for identity, through multiple rebirths and baptismal renewals in the Mississippi, is the story of *Huckleberry Finn*.

(Beaver, 85)

Critics such as Harold Beaver, James Cox or Richard Adams agree to say that *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* follows a "pattern of death and rebirth" (Adams, 397), that "[t]he whole *Huckleberry Finn* is a parody of Christian death and resurrection" (Beaver, 85). "I most wished I was dead" (Twain, 13), says Huckleberry at the beginning of the novel. When it finally happens, the teenager is free to become whoever he wants to be. Unlike Chris McCandless who sticks to one fake identity, Huck Finn accumulates fictional names and autobiographies. Trying to find himself on the river, he assumes indeed different lives and identities through the lies he tells to the strangers he meets on his way. "Sarah Williams" (619), "Mary Williams" (64), "George Peters" (67), "George Jackson" (99), the valet "Adolphus" (157), "Tom Sawyer" (217)... The wandering boy tries on a new name and a new personal history each time his raft makes a stopover on the river shore. As James Cox says in "Remarks on the Sad Initiation of Huckleberry Finn," he is "the man without identity who is reborn at almost every river bend" (Cox, 395). As soon as he decides to "dress up like a girl" (Twain, 60) in order to collect information at the end of chapter X, Huck starts a game of lies and disguises that will go on until the end of the novel. As Jeffrey Sommers says in his article on the "Dual Function of Clothing in *Huckleberry Finn*":

Huck, in his role-playing and donning of disguises, is re-enacting, rather theatrically perhaps, the rites of passage undergone by all youth, the sequential adopting of different identities in search of one's true identity.

(Sommers, 19)

Huckleberry's lies and transformations reflect his identity confusion but also his attempt for reconstruction. Lying becomes Huck's way of living. As the boy says himself in the first lines of the novel: "I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another" (Twain, 11). Thanks to the tales he makes believe to the stranger he meets, Huck Finn can decide on his own story and become what he has never been: a child with a family. As Eric Solomon confirms in "Huck Finn Once More," "Huck's lies are only one indication that a substantial basis for the novel is the boy's search of a family" (Solomon, 423). Thanks to his lies, Huckleberry can indeed invent an "Uncle Ben" (Twain, 127), "folks ... living Pike County, in Missouri" (127), a father who suffers from "smallpox" (94), or a "family living on a little farm down at the bottom of Arkansas" (102). By changing his name, by getting into other people's skin and by inventing a family for himself, Huck shapes his own identity and leads his journey of self-discovery. On the American road, movement and performance seem to be constantly connected to each other. The free wandering does not have "yesterdays" and allows personal reinvention and reconstruction through performance.

The idea of the road as an opportune milieu for the reinvention of the self also appears in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. By depicting young men on the road who "didn't know anything about [themselves]" (Kerouac, 145), Jack Kerouac problematizes the theme of self-discovery through movement. During his journey of self-introspection, Sal Paradise never stops dreaming of being someone else, wishing to be a "Negro," a "Denver Mexican" or "a poor overworked Jap" (179):

[I wished] I were a Negro ... I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a 'white man' disillusioned. ... A gang of colored women came by, and one of the young ones detached herself from motherlike elders and came to me fast - 'Hello Joe!' - and suddenly saw it wasn't Joe, and ran back, blushing. I wished I were Joe. I was only myself, Sal Paradise, sad, strolling in this violet dark, this unbearably sweet night, wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America

(Kerouac, 179-180)

In this passage, the reader is able to recognize the ardent feeling of escape that triggered Sal's initial departure and which was discussed in the previous chapter of this master's thesis. Even if Sal Paradise originally attempted to flee from civilization and from the intellectual milieu

of his campus life, he perhaps also tried to escape from himself, from his whiteness and from his sadness. As in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Into the Wild*, the extemporal road offers Sal a realm of possibility. Movement allows him to transform himself into whoever he wants to be and to leave for a while the sad paradise of his existence. For instance, when Sal travels with Terry – a beautiful Mexican girl he meets on a bus ride to Los Angeles – he starts a new life and fulfills for a while that fantasy to be a “Mexican” and “a Negro” (179). In Sabinal – Terry’s hometown – Sal lives with Terry’s family and progressively identifies himself as being a Mexican: “They thought I was a Mexican, of course; and in a way I am” (98). Moreover, to earn his life in Sabinal, Sal Paradise is forced to work for a short period in the cotton fields of America. The experience is unique and brings the Eastern boy back to the times of slavery: “There was an old Negro couple in the field with us. They picked cotton with the same God-blessed patience the grandfathers had practiced in ante-bellum Alabama” (96). In the cotton fields, Sal Paradise’s performance allows him to finally be “a man of the earth” (97) and to become one of the “Negroes of America” (180). As he says after a dinner celebrating his long day of work: “it was one of the greatest meals of my life, I was so hungry and tired. Sighing like an old Negro cotton-picker, I reclined on the bed and smoked a cigarette” (97). For Sal Paradise, performing characters on the road is a game, a pleasant adventure where he can – just as Huckleberry Finn – put himself into other people’s skins. After having played the Mexican and the cotton-picker in the fields of Sabinal, Sal gets tired of these characters, abandons Terry and goes back to his life of wandering where only the instant present matters. At Old Bull’s place on the riverbank of the Mississippi, Sal will then play another role in the company of Marylou, radically different from the one he performed in the fields of Sabinal:

Dean was rolling tea; and Marylou and I imitated Southern aristocracy.
“Why, Miss Lou, you look lovely and most fetching tonight.”
“Why, thank you, Crawford, I sure do appreciate the nice things you do say.”

(Kerouac, 148)

Sal Paradise uses the American road to perform the mythology of his country. This transhistorical road is the one of both the “old Negro cotton-picker” (97) and the “Southern aristocracy” (148). It is a performing space in movement, where Sal and his friends are allowed to discover, to interpret and to enact the complex diversity and history of the American nation.

Searching for the frontier: retracing the road of the American pioneers

“Americans have gone on the road to find America and find themselves” (Patton, 20) says Phil Patton in *Open Road – A Celebration of the American Highway*. Indeed, moving throughout the American landscape is a way to explore the origins of the nation. In *Romance of the Road*, Ronald Primeau confirms such a statement through his descriptions of road novels as “quest[s] for the soul of the nation” (Primeau, 51). In his critical work, the American academic analyses road novels by John Steinbeck (*Grapes of Wrath*, *Travels with Charley : In Search of America*), Richard Reeves (*American Journey*), William Least Heat-Mood (*Blue Highways : A Journey into America*) and Dayton Duncan (*Out West*); demonstrating how the protagonists of these stories want “to find or create – and eventually to celebrate – an American identity” (67):

A nation only two hundred years old will understandably spend much time and energy trying to find its identity ... Highway travel has a special lure for this kind of restlessness as reflected in such titles and subtitles as *In Search of America* and *A Journey into America*.

(Primeau, 51)

Although Ronald Primeau does not take into account Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* in that chapter, it seems that Sal’s journey can also be considered as an interesting example of a search for national identity. By going back to the age of slavery, to the time where the “American outlaws” (Kerouac, 276) were travelling through the continent,¹³ or even to the era of the “Fellahin Indians” (280),¹⁴ Sal Paradise performs and investigates the history of his country. His adventures can therefore be read as a time and space travel across the old New World.

To a certain extent, simply moving throughout the American landscape is a way to go back to origins. “There is nothing more American than being on the road” (Paton, 9) says Phil Paton in his critical work. Movement is indeed linked to America. Present from its genesis and throughout its construction, it is rooted in the country’s history and identity. As Alan Trachtenberg says in *Incorporation of America*, “Colombus ... inaugurated the westward

¹³ As Sal tells Dean during their trip to Mexico, their modern road is also “the route of old American outlaws who used to skip over the border and go down to old Monterrey” (Kerouac, 276).

¹⁴ On his way to Mexico, Sal goes as far as searching for the roots of mankind, dreaming of those Fellahin Indians who are “the essential strain of the basic primitive,” “the source of mankind and the fathers of it” (Kerouac, 280).

route (Trachtenberg, 11) in 1492. Since then, the myth of the American frontier has been the motor of the construction of the United States of America. Heading westward has become a way to constantly renew a realm of possibility, to offer hope for new starts and to perform the American dream. Westward movement itself is the pursuit of happiness. In 1826, Timothy Flint lamented on the despair of the American pioneers finally reaching the last frontier: “Alas! for the moving generation of the day, when the tide of advancing backwoodsmen shall have met the surge of the Pacific. They may then sit them down and weep for other worlds” (Flint, 203). In 1893, the pioneers reached indeed the Pacific coast. On the same year, Frederick Turner declared in *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* that the American frontier was closed with the end of the conquest of the West. However, many critics agree to say that the frontier myth did not vanish from American identity in 1893. American citizens found “other worlds” and continued their westward conquest; in the Pacific Ocean, in Vietnam, in space... Others simply went *on the road again* to rediscover the American West and to keep the myth alive. As Kris Lackey claims in *RoadFrames: The American Highway Narrative*:

The rhetoric of discovery – issuing from the wish to reenact pioneer hardships, to recreate an innocent country, and to imaginatively possess the land – remains vital after almost a century of American nonfiction automotive narratives and road novels.

(Lackey, Kris, 4)

The simple fact of moving throughout the American landscape is a reenactment of the voyages of the pioneers. By retracing the journeys of their ancestors, the heroes of American road narratives give a second life and a new perspective to the myth of the American frontier.

Road stories are heirs of the frontier myth. Like many other American modern travellers, Huck, Sal, Dean and Chris follow in the pioneers’ footsteps, pursuing a movement that was activated centuries ago. As Seelye says in “The American Tramp: A Version of the Picaresque,” “the pioneer, the wandering cowboy, the tramp and the Sunday driver are all part of the same pattern” (Seelye, 538). Hoboes are indeed the new frontiersmen, or as Seelye formulates it, “the ghost[s] of the frontiersman” (537). In “The Role of the Undesirables,” Eric Hoffer also points out the kinship and tries to unveil “a family likeness between tramps and pioneers” (Hoffer, 81). As he asserts, pioneers were nothing more than outcasts and drunkards, looking for evasion or adventure, “[c]learly the same types of people which now swell[...] the ranks of migratory workers and tramps” (Hoffer, 83):

Who were the pioneers? Who were the men who left their homes and went into the wilderness... The successful businessmen, farmers, and workers usually stayed where they were. Who then left for the wilderness and the unknown? Obviously those who had not made good: men who went broke or never amounted to much; men who though possessed of abilities were too impulsive to stand the daily grind; men who were slaves of their appetites -drunkards, gamblers, and woman-chasers; outcasts - fugitives from justice and ex-jailbirds. ...Finally there was a sprinkling of young and middle-aged in search of adventure.

(Hoffer, 82)

In her introduction to Jack Kerouac's novel, Ann Charters writes that *On the Road* is "a novel whose background is the recurrence of the pioneering instinct in American life and its expression in the migration of the present generation" (Kerouac, xvii). In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain somehow also suggests the relationship between his young traveller and the very first American pioneers. Huck Finn quotes indeed Christopher Columbus as a model, as the perfect adventurer who – like Tom Sawyer –would never abandon a journey:

Do you reckon Tom Sawyer would ever go by this thing? Not for pie, he wouldn't. He'd call it an adventure—that's what he'd call it; and he'd land on that wreck if it was his last act. And wouldn't he throw style into it?—wouldn't he spread himself, nor nothing? Why, you'd think it was Christopher C'lumbus discovering Kingdom-Come. I wish Tom Sawyer *was* here.

(Twain, 72)

Running away teenagers, hoboes, tramps and wanderers are all part of one lineage. Pushed by the same dream to find a better place behind the line of the horizon, they all retrace the pilgrimage of the old American road.

A western pilgrimage: the modern (con)quest of America

In *Into the Wild*, Chris McCandless literally looks like a pioneer when he is on the road. The young man who "roamed the West" (Krakauer, 19) wears a hat, a "Remington semiautomatic" (4) and is said to "look[...] like Jeremiah Johnson" (119). Desperately trying to understand and to get through Chris McCandless, Jon Krakauer ends up calling him a pilgrim: "He wasn't a nutcase, he wasn't a sociopath, he wasn't an outcast. McCandless was something else—although precisely *what* is hard to say. A pilgrim, perhaps" (85). Jack Kerouac also uses the image of the pilgrim in *On the Road*, twice describing Sal and Dean's adventure as a "pilgrimage" (Kerouac, 139, 303): "Did this mean that I should at last go on my pilgrimage on foot on the dark roads around America?" (303). Like the pioneers did, all

the protagonists of these three road novels go west, at least once, throughout their journey. Chris indeed travels through the American West for a long time before heading to Alaska. Huckleberry Finn certainly follows the Mississippi river but eventually concludes his journey by lighting out for the Territory. At the beginning of *On the Road*, Sal Paradise dreams of going west: “And for the first time in my life, the following afternoon, I went into the West. It was a warm and beautiful day for hitchhiking” (12). The American West is a dream, a mythological territory that the modern pilgrims know without knowing.

Before undertaking his travel, Sal Paradise “por[es] over maps of the United States ... for months, ... read[s] books about the pioneers and savor[es] names like Platte and Cimarron and so on” (Kerouac, 10). The American West is Sal’s fantasy, a vague and unknown realm of possibility that he only knows from Western B movies. When Sal finally gets on the road, he takes a job as a night watchman and can finally play the American cowboy:

[I]t was a fast walk along a silvery, dusty road beneath inky trees of California - a I road like in The Mark of Zorro and a road like all the roads! you see in Western B movies. I used to take out my gun and play cowboys in the dark.

(Kerouac, 65)

“It was like a Western movie” (65) says Sal Paradise, finally fulfilling his childhood dream. The West seems indeed to be deeply connoted to a childhood fantasy. In fact, Sal somehow confirms such a reading by telling Dean a memory, while they restlessly drive throughout the American territory:

“... As a child lying back in my father’s car in the back seat I also had a vision of myself on a white horse riding alongside over every possible obstacle that presented itself ...”

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” breathed Dean ecstatically. “Only difference with me was, I myself ran, I had no horse. You were a Eastern kid and dreamed of horses”

(Kerouac, 209)

On the road, the dream of galloping with a white horse becomes true and the “spirit of the West” (19) is unearthed. When Sal finds himself next to a cowboy laughing and yelling “hyaw hyaw hyaw hyaw” (19), the legend becomes facts: “I said to myself, Wham, listen to that man laugh. That’s the West, here I am in the West” (19). On the mythical road, Sal passes through the screen and is allowed to describe himself and Dean as “two broken-down heroes of the Western night” (190).

The wanderers of these road novels are modern pioneers, also because they aim for westward conquest and discovery. Chris wants to go where no one ever went. He puts himself in the situation of the pioneers by travelling by foot, without a map or any kind of localization tool. As Susan Kollin says in “The Wild, Wild North: Nature Writingm Nationalist Ecologies, and Alaska”:

By coming to Alaska, McCandless hoped to experience uncharted country, to locate an empty space on the map. Although it is doubtful whether blank spots existed anywhere in North America in 1992 – or in 1492 for that matter – McCandless nevertheless devised a solution to his dilemma. ... [H]e managed to resituate Alaska as a terra incognita awaiting his arrival simply by getting “rid of the map”

(Kollin, 41)

Gallien describes Chris as one of those numerous “people who think the unsullied enormity of the Last Frontier will patch all the holes in their lives” (Krakauer, 4). Like a pioneer, Chris aims to reach the end of America, to move until the very last frontier of the continent – which is now Alaska. In *On the Road*, Sal also aims for “the fantastic end of America” (Kerouac, 83). In his case, it is the Pacific Ocean, that puzzling place where “there ain’t no more land” (169). Like Chris, Sal has a restless need for conquest, for dominating the land through movement. He wants to go through the country, “to follow one great red line across America” (11), from one coast to the other. He wants to master the country – and perhaps even the entire world¹⁵ – through unstoppable movement. While “buzzing toward Sacramento and eastward again” (207), Sal Paradise reveals another meaningful childhood vision to his Dean Moriarty:

I told Dean that when I was a kid and rode in cars I used to imagine I held a big scythe in my hand and cut down all the trees and posts and even sliced every hill that zoomed past the window. “Yes! Yes!” yelled Dean. “I used to do it too”

(Kerouac, 208)

The two men share the same fantasy: cutting down the land while moving across it in a car. They want to recapture the American land, just the way they restlessly try to conquer women. Roaming the road transports the wanderers through time and space, allowing them to discover a new world that has already been conquered.

¹⁵ It can be noticed that Sal’s initial plan actually was to reach the Pacific coast and to “ship out with [his friend Remi Boncoeur] on an around-the-world liner” (Kerouac, 9).

Searching for the lost father

If movement across the American territory allows identity reconstruction through lies and inventions, it may also lead to a search for familial roots and personal origins. The quest for origins has been developed as a major theme in American road literature and cinema. In *Blue Highways*, High-Moon takes a journey into the Native heritage of his father and uses the road to get closer to the reality of his origins. In Wim Wenders's film *Paris, Texas*, Travis Henderson walks alone in the American desert, aiming for the place where he thinks he was conceived. In *On the Road*, Sal and Dean wander on the American road, enjoying themselves but also repeatedly trying to find Dean's father, "old bum Dean Moriarty the Tinsmith" (Kerouac, 132). The road is a way for Dean Moriarty to get back to his father and to his roots. During his trips around America, Dean can relive his lost childhood, contemplating the place he was born – "Sal, Sal, look, this is where I was born, think of it!" (212) –, or places that remind him of his father – "Gawd-damn! this is where my old man comes in the wintertime, sly old bum" (271). That search for Dean's father is only one of the numerous subplots of Kerouac's novel. However, this topic consistently repeats itself through the narration and occupies a major position in the evolution of the story. "[I]t's my father my father my father all over again!" (216) screams Dean before meeting his cousin in Denver, hoping to finally find an answer that would help the search for his origins. The quest for Old Dean Moriarty seems indeed to encircle the narration of *On the Road*. "[W]here was his raggedy father that night?" (217) is a recurring question that haunts the novel and yet never finds an answer, endlessly stalking Sal and Dean's journey: "I only want to know what's been happening in the family ... I want to remember, remember, I do!" (216-217). On the road, the quest for Old Moriarty becomes Dean's fixation and obsession, a desperate search for lost origins that motivates and somehow also justifies his restless wandering:

Dean was very quiet and preoccupied, looking at the old bums in the saloon that reminded him of his father. "I think he's in Denver - this time we must absolutely find him, he may be in County Jail, he may be around Larimer Street again, but he's to be found. Agreed?" Yes, it was agreed

(Kerouac, 191)

The hobo could be anywhere and it seems that there is not a single place where the investigation is not justified: "You see, I never know whether my father's there or not ... I never know whether to ask. He might be anywhere" (233). The two men "stay a few days for kicks and look for his father" (212), stroll in the streets "to see if [the] old man by chance may

be in Jiggs' Buffet or some of the other bars" (261). That constant presence-absence gives a ghostly dimension to the character of Old Dean Moriarty, who just like Pap in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* remains both omnipresent and invisible throughout the travel narrative. In *Understanding Jack Kerouac*, Matt Theado notices that "Old Dean appears in references at least a dozen times; yet like Hamlet's father's ghost, he is always distant and hazy, his meaning unclear" (Theado, 64).¹⁶ Old Dean Moriarty invisibly reigns over *On the Road*, plunging Sal and Dean into a restless quest from the beginning to the very end of the novel.

"Where was his father?" (Kerouac, 132) keeps repeating Sal during his journey on the American road. Although it is Dean's father that the two men are restlessly searching for, Sal who considers Dean as a "long-lost brother" (7) takes very seriously the task to find "the sad and fabled tinsmith of [his] mind" (179):

I passed the Windsor Hotel, where Dean Moriarty had lived with his father in the depression thirties, and as of yore I looked everywhere for the sad and fabled tinsmith of my mind. Either you find someone who looks like your father in places like Montana or you look for a friend's father where he is no more

(Kerouac, 179)

"Where is Sal's father?" may the reader ask himself. Whereas Dean's father is a recurrent topic in the work of Jack Kerouac, Old Sal Paradise is only mentioned twice in the narration. The first time, the citing is triggered by a racehorse named Big Pop that surprisingly reminds Sal of his father: "There was one horse called Big Pop that sent me into a temporary trance thinking of my father, who used to play the horses with me. ... Then I finally said it. 'Big Pop reminds me of my father'" (153). The second time, Sal simply announces that his old man is dead: "Here were the three of us - Dean looking for his father, mine dead, Stan fleeing his old one, and going off into the night together" (267). These are the only occurrences of the mentioning of Sal's father in Kerouac's novel. However, in *On the Road: The Original Scroll*, the narrator – whose name here is Jack Kerouac – opens his narration with the sentence: "I first met met Neal¹⁷ not long after my father died" (Kerouac, *Original*, 109). Furthermore, the "serious illness" evoked in the first paragraph of the published version is here directly related to the death of his father: "it really had something to do with my father's death and my awful feeling that everything was dead" (Kerouac, *Original*, 109). In *On the Road*, the death of the father disappears and is strangely replaced by a divorce. The absence – not to say the censor –

¹⁷ Dean Moriarty is originally named Neal Cassidy in *On the Road – The Original Scroll*.

of that narrative element could therefore explain the young man's desire to run after a surrogate father figure such as Old Dean Moriarty.

Searching for surrogate fathers

The road is a place for investigation, where the wanderers are able to look for their past and their origins. It is also a place of personal reconstruction where the runaways can encounter new role models. In *On the Road*, Sal's pursuit for Old Dean Moriarty progressively becomes a search for a surrogate father, an attempt to reach a lost father that cannot be found. Moreover, Old Dean Moriarty is not the only hobo that Sal and Dean are looking for during their journey. Following the same pattern of stopping in a city to look for the vanished tramp, Sal and Dean spend their time searching for an old friend named Hassel. The travelling man has been in "Texas" (Kerouac, 158), in "Detroit Skid Row" (245), in "Times Square" (247), almost everywhere in America. Just like Old Dean, Hassel could therefore be anywhere, and looking for him becomes an automatism at every stopover: "We got there in early morning. Times Square was being torn up, for New York never rests. We looked for Hassel automatically as we passed" (247). Like Old Dean Moriarty, Hassel and the weight of his absence regularly appear in the novel, progressively transforming the lost hobo into another ghost of the road:

Hassel had been here on Detroit Skid Row, he had dug every shooting gallery and all-night movie and every brawling bar with his dark eyes many a time. His ghost haunted us. We'd never find him on Times Square again. We thought maybe by accident Old Dean Moriarty was here too - but he was not.

(Kerouac, 245)

This passage clearly confirms the parallel between Old Dean Moriarty and Hassel. Both are old ghost-like hobos, disappeared ancestors lost on the American road, haunting a generation of wanderers.

Like Sal and Dean, Chris McCandless meets different fathers in order to replace the one he left at the beginning of his adventure. As it was discussed earlier, Chris finds his first spiritual fathers in the books he carries along with him during his expedition. Henri-David Thoreau and Walt Whitman's philosophies replace Walt McCandless's authority. However, the young man also meets various parental figures during his adventure. All these figures literally find him on the road, accepting to pick him up while he is hitchhiking. Chris's *parents of the road* all have an important role in his adventure, transforming his personality

and marking different stages of his journey before his disappearance into the wilderness. At Arcata California, Jan Burres and Bob pick Chris up off the road. Jan and Bob are rubber tramps, “a pair of drifters in an old van” (Krakauer, 30) travelling around the West and selling knick-knacks on their way. They represent the life on the road that Chris is looking for and are clearly opposed to the civilization of Walt McCandless. Although he does not tell them his real name, Chris develops a strong relationship with these surrogate parents and keeps writing them letters until he vanishes into the wild. Chris becomes especially close to Jan Burres who quickly and naturally adopts the role of a surrogate mother. As Jan tells Jon Krakauer during their interview, she had a son who vanished a few years before she met Chris. Taking care of Chris becomes her way of taking care of her disappeared son: “I have a son about the same age Alex was, and we’ve been estranged for a few years now. So I said to Bob, ‘Man, we got to take this kid with us’ (30). Moreover, according to Jan Burres’s testimony, Chris McCandless perfectly played his childish role when he was with her: “‘He liked to tease me and torment me,” she recalls. “I’d go out back to hang clothes on the line behind the trailer, and he’d attach clothespins all over me. He was playful, like a little kid” (45).

Chris also meets Wayne Westerberg on the road, the owner of a grain elevator in Carthage, South Dakota, who accepts to pick him up and to give him a job in his factory. As he did with Jan Burres and Bob, Chris stayed in contact with Wayne until the very end, “calling or writing Carthage every month or two” (Krakauer, 19). South Dakota became his second home and the family of the grain elevator became his second family. As Krakauer comments: “[i]f McCandless felt estranged from his parents and siblings, he found a surrogate family in Westberg and his employees” (18). Moreover, after having left Carthage, the boy from Virginia “told almost everyone he met thereafter that South Dakota was his home” (19) and “had all his mail forwarded to Westerberg’s address” (19). Another man that could be added to the list of Chris’s fathers of the road is Ronald Franz, an eighty-year old devout Christian who “stopped to give [Chris] a ride” (49) while the young man was walking alone on the Borrego-Salton Seaway. Like Jan Burres, Ronald has lost his children a long time ago and easily develops a father-son relationship with Chris. As Krakauer claims, “[w]hen Franz met McCandless, his long-dormant paternal impulses were kindled anew” (50). During his interview with Jon Krakauer, the old man tells him that he even went as far as asking Alex to become his adoptive grandson: “I asked Alex if I could adopt him, if he would be my grandson” (55). After having left Jan Burres, Bob, Wayne and Ronald, Chris meets his last father of the road on his way to the Stampede trail. Jim Gallien, a union electrician, picks

Chris up on his way to Anchorage. The man drives Chris as far as Denali and will be the last person to see him alive. He will also be the last one to give him a parental advice, offering him his boots and counseling him to reconsider his Alaskan odyssey.

In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huckleberry's search for a new father resides both in fiction – through the imaginary family members he invents in his lies – and in reality – through the encounters with the different role models that he actually meets along the river. As Kenneth S. Lynn claims in "You Can't Go Home Again," Huckleberry Finn "is in fact looking for another father to replace the one he has lost" (Lynn, 213). Indeed, Huck tries on different masculine models to play the role of new father during his adventure. All the men the boy meets during his journey are potential paternal figures, candidates to substitute the Pap he abandoned. The first one probably is his friend Tom Sawyer, the only reason that prevented him from running away from St. Petersburg in the first chapter of the novel:

I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out. I got into my old rags and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied. But Tom Sawyer he hunted me up and said he was going to start a band of robbers, and I might join if I would go back to the widow and be respectable. So I went back.

(Twain, 12)

As Huckleberry informs the reader in the first line of the novel: "You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*" (11). One may say that the two adventure novels have a father-son relationship. In the subtitle of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck is introduced as "Tom Sawyer's comrade" – since it was the way the 19th century reader was able to identify him. Huck always followed Tom Sawyer and developed a strong affection to the young boy: "I wanted him and me to be together" (13). Tom is the only person that Huckleberry misses after having left St. Petersburg: "I did wish Tom Sawyer was there" (40); "I wish Tom Sawyer *was* here" (72). While he quotes Pap as an authority on "borrowing" and superstition, Huck often mentions his friend Tom as a model of courage and ingenuity: "I says to myself, Tom Sawyer wouldn't back out now, and so I won't either" (72); "Nobody could spread himself like Tom Sawyer in such a thing as that" (40). Tom is that little rascal who plays with crime and proudly claims its name instead of – as Pap Finn does – concealing it. As Huckleberry says: "I called it borrowing, because that was what pap always called it; but Tom said it warn't borrowing, it was stealing" (234).

One may notice that except from the duke and the king, all the men that Huck Finn describes are in one way or another opposed to his natural father. When Huckleberry meets Col. Grangerford, he describes him as a “gentleman all over” (Twain, 107). The colonel thus instantly and radically contrasts with the figure of Pap Finn and appears as a potential surrogate father.

Col. Grangerford was very tall and very slim, and had a darkish-paly complexion, not a sign of red in it anywheres; he was clean shaved every morning all over his thin face, and he had the thinnest kind of lips, and the thinnest kind of nostrils, and a high nose, and heavy eyebrows, and the blackest kind of eyes. ... Everybody loved to have him around, too; he was sunshine most always—I mean he made it seem like good weather.

(Twain, 107-108)

The gentleman is clearly presented as Pap’s antagonist. One is clean and elegant whereas the other “got to sleep with the hogs in the tanyard” (28). One does not have “a sign of red” (107) on his face whereas the other is an alcoholic. One is loved by his surrounding, associated to “sunshine” and “good weather” (108), whereas the other is an outcast whose presence is always marked by “[c]oldness and whiteness” (Berret, 201). Besides, just to make the contrast even more obvious, Huckleberry goes as far as to mention Pap in the middle of Col. Grangerford’s description, in a strikingly unrelated way:

[T]he Widow Douglas said, and nobody ever denied that she was of the first aristocracy in our town; and pap he always said it, too, though he warn’t no more quality than a mudcat himself

(Twain, 107)

Another masculine model who appears as an alternative to Pap is Judge Thatcher – described by Harry G. Segal in his article as “the ideal father of *Tom Sawyer*” (Segal, 29) – who Huck immediately goes to see after having recognized Pap’s tracks in the snow: “I was at Judge Thatcher’s as quick as I could get there” (Twain, 25). Following this episode, Huckleberry goes to see another man, a slave, who owes a magical hair-ball that might give him information about the reasons of his father’s visit: “So I went to [Jim] that night and told him pap was here again, for I saw his tracks on the snow” (25). After having escaped from Pap’s cabin, Huck will meet Jim again on Jackson Island and will become his fellow traveler. Their relationship will last throughout the journey down the Mississippi river and one may say – as Lionel Trilling does in “An Introduction to Huckleberry Finn” – that Huckleberry will finally find in Jim “his true father” (Trilling, 329).

Adopting a black father

After having found each other on Jackson Island, Huck and Jim understand that they are both running away from the same “sivilization” of St. Petersburg. Going down the Mississippi river, the two fugitives then develop a strong friendship and progressively realize that they can respond to each other’s needs. In “You Can’t Go Home Again,” Kenneth S. Lynn notices that “[a]s Huck is searching for a father, so Jim is attempting to rejoin his family and he lavishes on the love-starved boy all his parental affection” (Lynn, 215). By transferring his paternal love and tenderness on the lonesome orphan, Jim clearly turns out to be the main surrogate father in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: “Jim lit out, and was a-coming for me with both arms spread, he was so full of joy ... [He] fished me out, and was going to hug me and bless me, and so on” (Twain, 200). Huck becomes “the best friend old Jim ever had in the world” (208). As for Jim, he offers the boy a masculine model that he can seemingly trust and rely on. The days on the raft pass and the reader progressively realizes that Huckleberry may have a lot to learn from that slave who is so eager to share his own knowledge: “Well, he was right; he was most always right; he had an uncommon level head for a nigger” (81). As Robert Shulman writes in his article: “[I]like a father initiating his son, Jim almost immediately passes along to Huck what he knows about the mysteries of nature” (Shulman, 330).

Jim certainly assumes the role of an “alternate father” (Segal, 20) in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. However, the slave sometimes also acts as a child, needing reassurance and education. In *Into the Wild*, Chris also had a strong impact on his surrogate parents, changing their existences as much as – if not more than – they changed his. For instance, Chris “gave Westerberg a treasured 1942 edition of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*” (Krakauer, 19) before departing and wrote “Listen to Pierre” on the title page. Chris also took the role of a wise guide during his discussions with Ronald Franz. In one of his letters to Ron, the young man wrote a long paragraph about the need for an adventurous spirit, trying to change the lifestyle and ideology of his adoptive grandfather:

I'd like to repeat the advice I gave you before, in that I think you really should make a radical change in your lifestyle ... The very basic core of a man's living spirit is his passion for adventure. ... Don't settle down and sit in one place. Move around, be nomadic, make each day a new horizon. You are still going to live a long time, Ron, and it would be a shame if you did not take the opportunity to revolutionize your life and move into an entirely new realm of experience.

(Krakauer, 57)

Chris's sermon may recall again Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road." Ronald Franz took the letter very seriously and embraced Chris's invitation to "move around" (57). During his interview with Jon Krakauer, Ronald claims that he stopped believing in God after Chris's death made a drastic change in his lifestyle. The old man started travelling and camping alone in the American desert, abandoning his "life of security, conformity, and conservatism" (57) for the sake of the adventurous impulsivity of the road.

Although Chris's impact on his surrogate fathers may be comparable to Huck's influence on Jim, it must be specified that Huck's fatherly attitude toward Jim is mostly due to the social hierarchy revolving around their relationship. Although Jim is an adult accompanying a teenager, he remains a slave trying to free himself and actually needing that little white boy to go down the river without being identified as "a runaway nigger" (Twain, 94). The ambiguity about Jim's status engenders a real complexity regarding his relationship to Huckleberry. The hierarchy is never clearly defined, thus making the two runaways frequently interchange parenting roles. As Reesman confirms in "Bad Fathering in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*," "Huck and Jim [are] debating and exchanging the roles of "father" and "son" as they travel downriver to meet all kinds of inappropriate fathers" (Reesman, 158). For instance, when Huckleberry figures out that the king and the duke are actually crooks, the boy prefers to leave Jim's innocence intact: "What was the use to tell Jim these warn't real kings and dukes? It wouldn't a done no good" (Twain, 154). In addition, when the raft is peacefully going down the river during the night, Huckleberry sometimes acts as a paternal figure to Jim, reading the slave stories "about kings and dukes and earls and such" (81); and trying to explain to him the fact that there are several languages in the world:

"Looky here, Jim; does a cat talk like we do?"

"No, a cat don't."

"Well, does a cow?"

"No, a cow don't, nuther."

"Does a cat talk like a cow, or a cow talk like a cat?"

"No, dey don't."

"It's natural and right for 'em to talk different from each other, ain't it?"

"Course."

"And ain't it natural and right for a cat and a cow to talk different from *us*?"

"Why, mos' sholy it is."

"Well, then, why ain't it natural and right for a *Frenchman* to talk different from us? You answer me that."

(Twain, 83-84)

The way Huckleberry uses here simple images and metaphors in order to make Jim understand a more complex idea may recall some of Plato's Socratic dialogues. Besides, the word "dialogue" seems to be more than adequate to qualify Huck and Jim's relationship on the raft. The two friends indeed spend their time in harmony, sharing respectful and friendly discussions, where they both assume in their turn the positions of speaker-teacher and learner-listener.

By contrast, the few discussions that occurred in the novel between Pap and Huckleberry always turned out to be monologues, long tirades where the old man was the only one to take the floor. For that matter – with the exception of the two short dialogues that Pap and Huck have at the beginning of chapter V and chapter VII – the boy always remains silent during the "conversations" he has with his father. Either the one-way discussion is a long monologue where Pap monopolizes the floor, or a brief summary recalled by Huckleberry in the passive voice:

When he had got out on the shed he put his head in again, and cussed me for putting on frills and trying to be better than him; and when I reckoned he was gone he come back and put his head in again, and told me to mind about that school, because he was going to lay for me and lick me if I didn't drop that.

(Twain, 29)

Apart from a mutual appeal to superstition, Pap and Jim do not seem to have anything in common. Patrick L. King claims the same in "The Contested Quest for Cultural Liberation in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*," saying that "[a]s far as Huck is concerned, Jim is everything his cruel and drunken father, Pap Finn, is not" (King, 52).

Jim, who is constantly worried about the boy's wellness and security, works as Pap's clearest antagonist in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. On the one hand, Pap spent the night chasing the boy around the cabin with a knife and shouts at him to wake him up in the early morning: "Git up! What you 'bout?" (Twain, 37). On the other hand, Jim prefers to stay up all night on watch to let Huckleberry sleep: "I went to sleep, and Jim didn't call me when it was my turn. He often done that" (154). After a childhood spent either alone or with Pap's coldness as sole company, Huckleberry can finally appreciate the paternal love he never had. As James Cox suggests in "Remarks on the Sad Initiation of Huck Finn," [a]cting as Huck's foster father, Jim brings to that role a warmth and gentleness which Huck had never known under the brutal masculinity of his real father" (Cox, 403). Jim is a healer whose kindness and humanity never endanger Huck's happiness and independence. Whereas Pap's human condition was constantly challenged by his spooky appearance and his animal behavior, Jim

never stops revealing his humanity throughout Huckleberry's journey. Although the slave was just a superstitious conman trying to defraud a naïve child in chapter IV – “The Hair-ball Oracle” –, he becomes “a mighty good nigger” (Twain, 154) and a “good man” with “a good heart” (274), ready to sacrifice his own freedom to save Tom's life at the end of the novel:

[T]hen the old doctor comes and takes a look, and says: ... I never see a nigger that was a better nuss or faithfuller, and yet he was risking his freedom to do it, and was all tired out, too, and I see plain enough he'd been worked main hard lately. I liked the nigger for that.

(Twain, 29)

The more the raft is going down the river, the more Jim is “humanized” and accepted by Huckleberry as a surrogate father figure. One may also notice that the boy presents the slave as his father when he tricks the two men on the skiff by inventing an imaginary pap suffering from smallpox: “it's pap that's there” (93). Moreover, as Kenneth S. Lynn reveals at the end of “You Can't Go Home Again”:

In one of the numerous sequels to *Huckleberry Finn* that Twain obsessively sketched out in his later years, Jim has somehow been caught again, and Huck fantastically plans to free him by changing places with him and blacking his face, as if by making Huck a Negro Twain hoped to bridge the gulf that now separated “son” from “father.”

(Lynn, 245)

So, who is Huckleberry's real father? The white, violent and biological parent? Or the black, loving and unrelated friend? The mentioning of the Judgment of Solomon in chapter XIV – “Was Solomon Wise?” (Twain, 80) – allows the parallel between Huck's dilemma and the story from the Hebrew Bible. Huckleberry is torn between these two masculine models – both believers of superstition – who fight in his conscience like black and white angels. These two antagonist forces may besides recall the two angels that the hair-ball's prediction saw at each side's of Pap's personality in chapter IV:

One uv 'em is white en shiny, en t'other one is black. De white one gits him to go right a little while, den de black one sail in en bust it all up. A body can't tell yit which one gwyne to fetch him at de las'.

(Twain, 26)

This moral dilemma acts as a civil war in Huckleberry's conscience throughout the descent of the river. It deeply disturbs the boy, having to decide between the horrifying whiteness of his biological father and the friendly blackness of a slave. Looking for surrogate fathers along the

river is a way for Huck Finn to reconstruct himself after having killed himself as Pap's son. As for helping Jim to escape from slavery, it might be Huck's own way to find independence.

Freeing a slave: a personal quest for liberty

The last portion of this second chapter focuses on Mark Twain's novel, decrypting Huck's movement on the Mississippi as a solution to find emancipation from the Southern civilization of his father. Indeed, Huck and Jim's journey down the river is a quest for freedom and independence that can be read at different levels. On the one hand, it is explicitly a race against slavery to reach the Northern states where Jim will be able to live as a free man. On the other hand, going down the river and helping a "nigger" to flee is a way for Huck to claim his independence from the hold of the Southern civilization of his father. Jim is the first person Huckleberry speaks to in his second life. After his evasion from Pap's cabin, the boy wanders alone on Jackson Island, until the night he runs into Miss Watson's slave. From this moment on, Huck instinctively associates himself to Jim. As Leo Marx observes in his article, the boy oddly uses the pronoun "us" whereas there is no actual reason to do so:

"Git up and hump yourself, Jim!" he cries. "There ain't a minute to lose. They're after us!" What particularly counts here is the *us*. No one is after Huck; no one but Jim knows he is alive.

(Marx, 352)

In chapter XI – "They're After Us" – Huckleberry thus merges Jim's escape with his own. Thereafter, the boy will often use the phrase "we was" (Twain, 58) to describe his life with Jim on the raft. By combining plural and singular, the grammatical configuration stands out and reinforces the sense of unity between the two runaways: "we was free and safe once more" (18). Within only a few lines, Huck and Jim become partners and take the decision to flee together down the Mississippi river. However, this sudden alliance may lead to one interrogation: why is Huckleberry helping Jim? The boy does not have anything to earn in this business and although he swore that he would not denounce Jim when they met on the island (50), he never committed to escort him to the free states. Moreover, sharing a raft in company with a slave only makes Huck appear more suspicious and therefore constantly endangers his own freedom – which he guaranteed when he staged his own murder in Pap's cabin. A hypothesis could be that personal emancipation is the underlying reason motivating Huck's decision to help Jim.

By helping a slave to reach freedom, Huckleberry irrevocably confronts and transcends the authority of the civilization of his natural father. As Reesman suggests in “Bad Fathering in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*”: “[i]n helping Jim flee slavery, Huck escapes his own slavery under pap” (Reesman, 158). He progressively abandons the social prejudices of his heritage, separates himself from “the good citizens of the South” (Donaldson, 34) and affirms himself as an individual. Huck and Jim are symbolically both running away from Pap and from the violent “sivilization” he embodies. Indeed, Pap sees himself as “boss of his son” (Twain, 30), as well as boss of the American slaves. In his tirade against the “free nigger” (34), Pap was accusing the “p’fessor in a college” (35) to have nice clothes and to be educated, which is the exact same thing he had been reproaching Huck earlier in the novel:

He had the whitest shirt on you ever see, too, and the shiniest hat; and there ain’t a man in that town that’s got as fine clothes as what he had; and he had a gold watch and chain, and a silver-headed cane—the awfulest old gray-headed nabob in the State. And what do you think? They said he was a p’fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything.

(Twain, 34-35)

Calling himself “a low down Abolitionist” (50), Huckleberry fights against the ethics of his inheritance. The boy who already did not want “to tie Jim to the tree for fun” (15) at the beginning of the novel was meant to become Jim’s liberator. Besides, as Kenneth S. Lynn affirms in his article, “[t]he liberation theme is announced in the title of the novel’s very first chapter: ‘I Discover Moses and the Bulrushers’” (Lynn, 208):

[T]he humorous introduction to the Biblical saga at the very start of the book effectively ushers in the majestic theme of slavery and freedom, and inexorably associates Huck – a native of the river valley which its most famous citizen, Abraham Lincoln, called the “Egypt of the West” – with the little Jewish child whi, abandoned in a great, continental river, grew up to lead an enslaved people to freedom.

(Lynn, 208)

Trying to liberate Jim and to save himself, Huckleberry Finn undergoes a vehement internal fight against the violence of his origins. The battle occurs in his own mind, taking shape in a series of long monologues reflecting his agonizing indecision. As the psychological conflict goes on, Huckleberry’s adventure on the Mississippi river progressively reveals itself as a complex journey down the stream of the boy’s tormented consciousness.

“They call that a govment that can’t sell a free nigger till he’s been in the State six months” (Twain, 35). Whether Huckleberry wants it or not, his father’s voice resonates in his head throughout his trip down the river. Every time Huckleberry thinks of saving Jim from slavery, he feels uneasy and miserable, going as far as wishing his own death – “I most wished I was dead” (91). The more the raft goes down on the river, the more “the psychological battle within Huck’s mind” (Lynn, 215) tears the boy’s conscience in half:

I couldn’t get that out of my conscience, no how nor no way. It got to troubling me so I couldn’t rest; I couldn’t stay still in one place. ... Conscience says to me, “What had poor Miss Watson done to you that you could see her nigger go off right under your eyes and never say one single word? What did that poor old woman do to you that you could treat her so mean? Why, she tried to learn you your book, she tried to learn you your manners, she tried to be good to you every way she knowed how. *That’s* what she done.” I got to feeling so mean and so miserable I most wished I was dead. I fidgeted up and down the raft, abusing myself to myself ...

(Twain, 91-92)

That sequence is one example of the internal dialogue happening in Huckleberry’s mind. Split between the desire to help a friend and the duty to report a “runaway nigger” (208), the boy desperately tries to re-establish peace in his polyphonic conscience, where white and black angels restlessly fight against each other.

When Huck learns that Jim intends to release his wife and children as soon as he reaches liberty – or to “get an Ab’litionist to go and steal them” (Twain, 92) – it seems like if a ghost suddenly appears from the past and whispers an “old saying” (92) into the boy’s ear:

It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn’t ever dared to talk such talk in his life before. Just see what a difference it made in him the minute he judged he was about free. It was according to the old saying, “Give a nigger an inch and he’ll take an ell.”

(Twain, 92)

The climactic episode of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* probably occurs when Huck, tormented by guilt, is about to send a letter to Miss Watson revealing Jim’s location: “Miss Watson your runaway nigger Jim is down here two mile below Pikesville” (208). Then comes a long stream of consciousness where Huck remains immobile, staring at the letter of denunciation, while remembering all the wonderful moments spent on the raft with his new friend:

[I] got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me all the time: in the day and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing. ... I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, 'stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was.

(Twain, 208)

The reverie finally ends with Huck claiming: "All right, then, I'll *go* to hell" (208) before tiring up the letter. It seems that by going to "hell," Huckleberry finally found a way to break up with the Southern civilization of his father. Indeed, from this moment on, Huckleberry will never quote Pap again. He will undertake the mission to "go to work and steal Jim out of slavery again" (209). One may even suggest that Jim's final evasion from the cabin works as mirror with Huck first evasion from Pap's cabin. As Harold Beaver says in his book, "[t]he echo is quite deliberate: 'Jim's counterpin' matches Pap's 'horse-blanket' as screen" (Beaver, 84). During this episode, the two evasions clearly reflect on each other, revealing their unity and combining purposes. Choosing between Pap and Jim becomes the central stage of Huckleberry's search for liberty. Jim's liberation acts as an allegory for Huck's search for emancipation from the violent civilization of his childhood.

When the character becomes the author: reaching independence

At the end of the novel, Huckleberry appears to be radically different from the young raggedy boy he was at the beginning of his adventure. Lighting out for the territory, the adolescent *starts on a new life* ruled by movement, far away from the haunted river of his past. Huckleberry's last speech testifies of a new kind of freedom: "there ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I'd a knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a tackled it" (Twain, 281). That last statement clearly breaks with the boy's introductory speech at the beginning of the novel:

You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly.

(Twain, 11)

Huckleberry is no longer the minor character of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* but his own author and creator. The “claim to authorship” (Reesman, 176) is highlighted by Reesman in “Bad Fathering in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*”: “If [Huckleberry] allowed that Twain created him in the beginning, now he claims to have invented himself without a creator’s agency in the end” (Reesman, 176). It can be noticed that all the wanderers of the three novels belonging to the corpus of this master’s thesis are their own authors, who follow the rhythm of the road to dictate their narration. However, if *On the Road* and more especially *Into the Wild* are partly non-fictional – which may explain the claim to authorship from their narrators – *Adventures of Huckleberry* clearly is pure fiction and its main character maliciously disrupts the rules of enunciation by auto-proclaiming himself the writer of his adventures. Through movement, Huckleberry Finn becomes a “boss” (Twain, 46), for the very first time of his life: “I went exploring around down through the island. I was boss of it; it all belonged to me, so to say, and I wanted to know all about it” (46). Through movement, Huck Finn becomes his own author and manages to free himself from the shadow of Tom Sawyer. Furthermore, in “Chapter the Last, Nothing More to Write,” Huck actually finds himself in the same situation as he was in the beginning of the novel. His father is declared as missing and the young boy does not want to be “sivilized” by any more women. What made him stay at the beginning – the desire to be with Tom – does not hold him back anymore. Huckleberry, who has always been described as “Tom Sawyer’s companion,” finally cuts with his past and affirms himself as a main protagonist, not needing anyone to create his own adventures.¹⁸ Throughout his journey, Huckleberry Finn searched, learned, grew up and perhaps found an answer to his urgency to move.

Conclusion – searching for movement

The road allows the reinvention of the self and the shaping of a new identity for the lost wanderer. It permits an escape from civilization, a search for a national identity and an investigation of personal origins. It provides an endless realm of possibilities, a space and time machine allowing the wanderers to abandon a past history and to look for a new self. But what happens when the escape and the search reach their respective ends? What happens

¹⁸ That final denouement presenting Huck Finn freed from his influent peer can be compared to the ending of *On the Road*. In the final part of Kerouac’s novel, Sal puts an end to his wandering and refuses to go on the road another time with Dean. As both Huck and Sal were dreaming of becoming Tom and Dean, they both eventually detach themselves from their idol at the end of their adventure.

when nothing seems to justify moving anymore? Is there a moment where “running away” and “running after” somehow become “just running”? In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, in *On the Road* and in *Into the Wild*, the wanderers actually never decide to stop running. Except from Sal Paradise, the lonesome travellers pursue their journey beyond the frame of the narration. They keep escaping from invisible ghosts and searching for inexpressible quests. They keep restlessly waiting for another river bench, for another unsoiled land, for another girl, for another vision. Despite the absence of motives justifying their movement, they still wander. They keep moving, while the reader progressively realizes that they have actually never been looking for anything else.

Just running

The tragedy of movement

*Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night? :
“Whither goest thou?” echoed Dean with his mouth open. We sat and
didn’t know what to say. There was nothing to talk about any more.
The only thing to do was go.*

(Kerouac, 119)

Movement has several motives and purposes in the three novels of our corpus. The journeys of the wanderers all start as escapes and progressively transform themselves into quests. However, all these enterprises eventually fail or never find resolutions. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *On the Road* and *Into the Wild*, movement never tires. Indeed, all the protagonists of these different novels – perhaps except from Sal Paradise – end up on the road, either running, dying or degenerating. Most road novels conclude themselves with their protagonists completing the circle of their journey, traveling back home with a new conception of life and transcending answers to their questions. In these three novels, the travelers do not find an end to their roads. They pursue the endless journey beyond the boundaries of the narration, wandering around, lighting out for the Territory or just slowly agonizing in a broken-down mini bus. Even if movement can be a solution to a life crisis, a way out born from rejection and allowing personal reconstruction, it may also become a curse, a malediction enclosing the wanderer into a never-ending circle. Although full of joy and humor, these road stories do not have happy endings. When movement becomes the destination, it does not lead to salvation anymore. It creates wandering ghosts, doomed to cross the American territory forever, waiting for their own end rather than for the end of the road.

The fathers we never found

The last sentence of *On the Road* concludes the novel with a failure: “I think of Dean Moriarty. I even think of Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty” (Kerouac, 307). If the road is a soil for escape, hope, quest and dreams, it can also be cruel and never provide a suitable exit to its wanderers. At the end of Jack Kerouac’s novel Old Dean Moriarty remains vanished, “lost somewhere in America” (Theado, 64). The father who the two travellers restlessly looked for throughout their journey will never be found and

will fade out with the frenzy of the road. In *Into the Wild*, the feeling of failure also dominates the conclusion of the narration. Chris did not actually find freedom and happiness on the road. Neither did he find a surrogate father, although many pretenders proposed themselves. As stated before, Ron offered Chris to adopt him and to become his father. However, Ron testified that “McCandless, uncomfortable with the request, dodged the question” (Krakauer, 55). The young man only answered: “We’ll talk about it when I get back from Alaska, Ron” (55). In the same way, Huck Finn did not accept to be adopted throughout his adventures. Whereas the young orphan encountered a series of men on his way down the Mississippi river, the masculine models deceived him one after the other and Huck resigned himself to remain a boy without a father.

In the last chapter of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck discovers that Jim, his guardian black angel, has been keeping a secret from him from the beginning of their journey. Just after having learned about his new freedom, Jim finally unveils the truth, revealing that the dead body they found in chapter IX – “The House of Death Floats By” – was Huck’s father:

Doan’ you ‘member de house dat was float’n down de river, en dey wuz a man
in dah, kivered up, en I went in en unkivered him and didn’ let you come in?
Well, den, you kin git yo’ money when you wants it, kase dat wuz him.

(Twain, 280-281)

During the whole adventure, Jim was hiding that truth from Huck. When they first found the body in the floating house, he covered the face of the corpse and told Huckleberry to look away. When the boy gave him a second chance to break the secret on the following day, the slave managed to cut short the conversation and ban the topic forever: “I wanted to talk about the dead man and guess out how he come to be killed, ... Jim didn’t want to. He said it would fetch bad luck” (Twain, 58). The optimistic reading – which was the consensus for postwar critics – would be that Jim was only trying to protect Huck from the truth, just the way the boy did with him when he chose not to reveal that the king and the duke were actually “rapscallions” (152). However, from the late 60’s, many critics agreed to say that the slave kept lying until his liberation for more selfish reasons. Indeed, without drunken Pap hanging around St. Petersburg, Huck could have decided to go back home and to leave the slave alone on the raft. Jim’s travel down the Mississippi river would have then been much more difficult without a white person by his side, preventing people for seeing him as a “runaway nigger” (94). Harold Beaver argues in his critical work on Twain’s novel that the optimistic reading about Jim’s secret can easily be challenged and that “[p]ostwar critics now seem astonishingly

naïve” (176):

How blinkered could one be! Jim was on the run. He was a fugitive slave. Now at last he held a trump card and kept it face down. It was a ruthless exercise of power. Huck was now his unconscious hostage. Throughout the length of that 1,100-mile-long journey he clung to that image.

(Beaver, 176)

Besides, Jim had already lied to Huck at the beginning of the novel – in “The Hair-ball Oracle” chapter – by playing with the boy’s innocence in order to serve his own interests. One could therefore be allowed to say that Jim actually never stop lying throughout *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Even though Huck surely became “the best friend old Jim ever had in the world” (Twain, 208) the friendship between the boy and the slave always rested upon dishonesty. With Jim’s revelation in “Chapter the Last, Nothing More to Write,” the bonding between Huck and Jim suddenly breaks. The boy does not even comment on the discovery, his only response being the sudden conclusion of the novel:

[“Y]ou kin git yo’ money when you wants it, kase dat wuz him.”
Tom’s most well now, and got his bullet around his neck on a watch-guard for a watch, and is always seeing what time it is, and so there ain’t nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it.

(Twain, 281)

Jim’s revelation has a symbolical value. It works as the last and hardest letdown of a series of disillusionments that Huckleberry experienced throughout his adventures.

Although Huck Finn has been juggling with different masculine models since the beginning of the novel, it eventually turns out that “there is no reliable Father figure in the book” (Reesman, 158). One after the other, all the surrogate fathers that Huck meets during his journey end up disappointing him. For instance, on chapter XVIII, Huck progressively realizes that Col. Grangerford is not as majestic as he first appeared to be. The colonel and his “ideal” family have indeed been caught in a feud for years without even knowing the original reason. The absurd conflict eventually leads to one of the most tragic and violent episodes of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*:

Despite the Sunday values they pay lip service to, the Grangerfords separate brotherly love and positive family feeling from what they are really committed to: killing in the name of conventional honor.

(Shulman, 336)

Following this pessimistic interpretation of the novel, even Judge Thatcher's goodwill may now be read as dishonest. In "Life without Father: The Role of the Paternal in the Opening Chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*," Harry G. Segal questions the judge's integrity and highlights the fact that his virtuous reputation prevents from seeing his potential cupidity. No one can indeed assure that the so-called perfect Judge Thatcher solely had noble intentions when he accepted the money that Huckleberry gave him:

From a man looked up to as a god by the townspeople in *Tom Sawyer* to a lawyer contemplating taking money from a child in *Huckleberry Finn*, Thatcher sounds like a con man, too. In this sequel, ideals fathers are no longer ideals.

(Segal, 29-30)

The disillusionments go on and accrue to finally peak in the last chapter of the novel where Huckleberry discovers that his two best friends have been lying to him from the beginning of the journey. As Scott Donaldson highlights in "Pap Finn's Boy," "*both* Jim and Tom had been withholding part of the truth from him" (Donaldson, 37). Within a few lines, the whole dynamic of Huck's adventure collapses. Not only Jim but also Tom abused of Huckleberry's trust. His lifelong companion tricked him for the sole purpose of getting some amusement: "I wanted the *adventure* of it" (Twain, 277). After a long series of stratagems and subterfuges to get the slave out of the cabin, Tom finally admits that he knew, from the moment he met Huckleberry at the Phelps farm, that Jim had been set free a long time ago. "How w'd overdone this thing" (261) said Huck about Tom's far-fetched scenario to get Jim out of his prison. He could not have been more right about it. Indeed, while Huck was surprised to discover that Tom could be a "*nigger stealer*" (219), his friend was just playing with him. The final revelation thus unveils Tom's childish personal motives and allows Huckleberry to set everything in order: "I couldn't ever understand before, until that minute and that talk, how he *could* help a body set a nigger free" (278). In his article, Scott Donaldson notices that after this point, Huckleberry completely detaches himself from his old friend and "wants nothing more to do with [his] self-dramatizations" (Donaldson, 37):

When Huck finds out that Tom had known all along, he tacitly rejects Tom's proposal that the three of them – Huck, Tom, and Jim – go off for "howling adventures amongst the Injuns." He will have nothing more to do with Tom Sawyer.

(Donaldson, 33)

At the end of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck has actually lost more than one father. As Eric Solomon points out in “Huck Finn Once More”: “Twain’s primary purpose in *Huckleberry Finn* was to find Huck a family” (Solomon, 426). However, it turns out that the boy never seemed to find anyone matching his expectations. Although “[e]ach family Huck contacts is a little better than the previous one; still, all the possible family relationships fail for him” (Solomon, 425).

As explained before, Huckleberry mostly invents his surrogate family through the numerous tales he yarns during his adventure. The young boy’s complex lies allow him for a while to become a child with a family. However, even though Huck can create a fictional family in Arkansas, Missouri or Great Britain, he irrevocably remains alone on the river and always needs to find a way to explain the absence of his relatives.

My folks was living in Pike County, in Missouri, where I was born, and they all died off but me and pa and my brother Ike. Pa, he ‘lowed he’d break up and go down and live with Uncle Ben, who’s got a little one-horse place on the river, forty-four mile below Orleans.

(Twain, 127)

Whether the members of Huck’s family tragically died or suffer from smallpox, they always remain missing or far away from him. As Harold Beaver observes, Huckleberry “invariably invents tangled and complex family relationships, which are at once doomed to destruction” (Beaver, 86). At the beginning of the novel, the boys from Tom Sawyer’s gang complain about the fact that Huck will have no relatives to be killed if he breaks the pact they have all agreed on: “Here’s Huck Finn, he hain’t got no family; what you going to do ‘bout him? ... he’s got a father, but you can’t never find him these days” (Twain, 17). These words resonate throughout the whole novel. Just as all the surrogate fathers that Huck progressively saw falling apart, his fictional relatives are also doomed to destruction in his lies. Huckleberry Finn, who abandoned the only man who was left from his family, keeps drifting alone on the Mississippi river, doomed to remain an orphan for eternity.

The impossible escape

Some literary critics go as far as saying that the ending of Mark Twain’s novel shows that Huck also fails to escape from his father. Academics such as Prioleau, Reesman or Donaldson indeed agree to say that the optimistic reading of the concluding chapter is “idealistic”

(Reesman, 176). According to them, Huckleberry never completely escapes from his father. When the boy finally learns about Pap's death, he shows no reaction; he does not say a word and no one can therefore know what is in his mind at that very moment. It could be hence easily suggested that Huckleberry does not believe of his father's death, just the way he ignored what "people said" (Twain, 21) in the beginning of the novel. In chapter III, Huck has indeed refused the hypothesis that the drowned body found in the river was that of his father. The only arguments he then used to defend his position appeared to be completely absurd and irrational: "a drowned man don't float on his back, but on his face. So I knowed, then, that this warn't pap, but a woman dressed up in a man's clothes" (21). However, a couple of days afterwards, the boy found his old father in his bedroom. Consequently, when Jim tells Huck that he recognized his father as being the dead body they found in the floating house, no one knows if the boy does not have any other complex scenario in his mind. He neither cries nor jumps for joy but only goes for the thing he knows best, which is running away.

As many literary critics agree, Huck does not only fail to accept his father's death at the end of his adventurous escape, but also never succeeds to completely free himself from Pap's ghostly influence. According to Elizabeth Prioleau in "'That Abused Child of Mine': Huck Finn as the Child of an Alcoholic," at the end of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, "Pap's ghost now reigns supreme" (Prioleau, 91). Scott Donaldson had already used this same metaphor of the ghost in his article from 1971 to comment on the ending of Twain's novel. He suggested that when Huck decides to flee again at the end of the last chapter, "[he] does not really go alone. The ghost of his father tramps alongside" (Donaldson, 37). Donaldson's thesis argues that "Pap's example is too strong to overcome" (35) and goes as far to claim that Huckleberry is doomed to follow in his father's footsteps for the rest of his life. No matter how hard he tries, there are "certain lessons Huck can never learn, lessons which go against the grain of his heritage" (32). Donaldson uses problematic sentences uttered by Huckleberry in the last part of the novel – such as "I knowed he was white inside" (Twain, 265) – to back up his statement. In this way, the critic attempts to demonstrate that Huck never completely abandoned the social prejudices taught by his father and "can never accept Jim as his equal, because he is a Negro" (Donaldson, 35):

Despite efforts to "sivilize" him, Huck Finn remains the child of his father. He accepts Pap's sense of superiority to niggers, he accepts Pap's superstitious beliefs, and he accepts Pap's role.

(Donaldson , 37)

In spite of his initial flight from Pap's cabin, of the symbolical murder he staged in the wood, of the psychological escape he led through his lies and inventions, of the influence of the surrogate fathers he met along the way and of his brave decision to steal Jim out of slavery, it seems that Huckleberry never managed to completely free himself from the ghost of his father. Pap's dead body has not been buried and continues to haunt Huck Finn. It lies at the spring of the stream and will eternally haunt the running boy.

The paradoxical quest

Not only the escapes, but also the quests undertaken in these three road novels eventually fail. One may add that they were actually all doomed to fail from the beginning. There is indeed a series of paradoxes revolving around the essence of the journey that never stop preventing those hopeful enterprises from finding their resolutions. First, there is Huck Finn, desperately trying to reach the free states while drifting south. Then, there is Chris McCandless, who has been continually searching for happiness by running away from civilization and ends up agonizing on the road on his own, "[l]onely" and "scared" (Krakauer, 170). Throughout his adventure, Chris McCandless convinces himself that the only way to reach freedom and happiness is to remain alone, lost in the wild, following his instinct and impulsivity. In a postcard sent to Wayne Westerberg, Chris declares that he has "decided that [he was] going to live this life for some time to come. The freedom and simple beauty of it is just too good to pass up" (33). It is through isolation and lonesomeness that McCandless aims to reach freedom and happiness, two metaphysical goals repeatedly discussed in his writing. However, dying in a minibus in the middle of nowhere, Chris notes on his copy of *Doctor Zhivago* that "HAPPINESS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED" (189). The man who has always been able to "be alone without being lonely" (107) eventually confronts himself to the dreadful and dangerous fatality of solitude: "S.O.S. I NEED YOUR HELP. I AM INJURED, NEAR DEATH, AND TOO WEAK TO HIKE OUT OF HERE. I AM ALL ALONE" (12). Chris's ending is both tragic and ironic, unveiling a latent paradox revolving around his whole escapade into the wild.

Sal Paradise's journey on the roads of America is not an exception. Both endlessly moving to escape from women and desperately looking for the perfect girl to settle down with, the lost wanderer is cloistered in his own paradox. From the beginning of his unbridled wandering to its very end, Sal expresses his strong desire to find the girl he loves: "Oh where

is the girl I love? I thought, and looked everywhere, as I had looked everywhere in the little world below” (Kerouac, 78). Sal’s dream girl is a central topic of *On the Road*. Not only looking for a short-time relationship, the young bachelor never stops asking the same question to each girl he meets on his way: “What do you want out of life?” (57). At the beginning of part two, Sal admits that he is actually “looking for the woman [he wants] to marry” (117): “I couldn’t meet a girl without saying to myself, what kind of wife would she make?” (117). As stated before, running away from women – from his aunt, from his first wife and from all the girls he encounters on his way – initially is one of the main motors of Sal’s unpredictable wandering. However, finding settlement also seems to be the ultimate destination of his journey throughout America. As the young man tells Dean, “[a]ll I hope, Dean, is someday we’ll be able to live on the same street with our families and get to be a couple of oldtimers together” (253). As surprising as it may sound, Dean Moriarty also claims to be looking for the perfect woman on the road. When Sal reveals his strong desire to settle down, the frantic player claims that he has “been digging [him] for years about the *home* and marriage and all those fine wonderful things about [the] soul” (117). Throughout his expedition, Dean accumulates romances and weddings, finding a new dream girl almost every time he stops in a city. Like Sal, Dean Moriarty likes dreaming of his future life of stability, imagining himself and Sal, both married neighbors playing with each other’s kids:

We’re going to go and live on a farm in Pennsylvania this summer - station wagon for me to cut back to New York for kicks, nice big house, and have a lot of kids in the next few years.

(Kerouac, 250)

Sal keeps repeating to Dean that “[t]his can’t go on all the time - all this frantiness and jumping around. We’ve got to go someplace, find something” (117). Despite all the exciting frenzy of movement praised in the novel, both the travelling men seem to choose settlement as their final destination.

Every time Sal and Dean make a stopover, it seems that the girl of the city is the one that they will never leave. When Sal meets Terry in Los Angeles, he claims that she is “[his] girl and [his] kind of girlsoul” (Kerouac, 83). When he then encounters Lucille in New York, he presents her as “a beautiful Italian honey-haired darling that [he] actually want[s] to marry” (116). As for Dean, he accumulates romances and repeatedly jumps from one wife to the other, from Camille to Marylou, depending on the city he is dwelling in: “Everything was decided again: they were going to stick. Marylou was the only girl Dean ever really loved”

(111). However, the frenzy of the road never totally disappears and keeps breaking the relationships of the two wanderers. It always interferes and constantly comes up as a recurring excuse to slow down the process of settling down. Before getting married with Camille, Dean must absolutely go to Texas to “dig Old Bull Lee that [he] never met” (48):

“Everything’s straight,” he announced. “I’m going to divorce Marylou and marry Camille and go live with her in San Francisco. But this is only after you and I, dear Carlo, go to Texas, dig Old Bull Lee, that gone cat I’ve never met and both of you’ve told me so much about, and then I’ll go to San Fran.”

(Kerouac, 47-48)

Around the end of the novel, before divorcing Camille and getting married to Marylou, a similar imperative comes up again. Dean must unequivocally go to Mexico to obtain the divorce papers before committing himself to Marylou: “we’re going to get married as soon as I can get divorce papers from Camille - everything’s jumping, Sal, and we’re off. Yes!” (226). The road always interferes and systematically ruins the stability of Sal and Dean’s relationships with women. When Dean lives in San Francisco with Camille, he radically changes his lifestyle. He becomes the father of a little girl and obtains a job to provide money for his family. Although the profession is directly related to movement – he works on the railroad – it seems that Dean has found calm and finally abandoned the crazy rhythm of the road. However, Sal learns that Dean “suddenly ... blew his top while walking down the street one day. He saw a ‘49 Hudson for sale and rushed to the bank for his entire roll. He bought the car on the spot” (110). Movement always seems to win in Dean’s paradoxical quest for settlement.

Movement and women are in a restless fight against each other in Kerouac’s novel. It seems that there is not enough place for both of them. Wandering and commitment cannot coexist on the American road. Already at the beginning of the novel, Sal’s desire to go on the road prevented him from flirting with “the prettiest girls in the world”:

There were the most beautiful bebies of girls everywhere I looked in Des Moines that afternoon ... but I had no time now for thoughts like that and promised myself a ball in Denver. ... So I rushed past the pretty girls, and the prettiest girls in the world live in Des Moines.

(Kerouac, 16)

When Sal Paradise sees Terry at a bus station in Los Angeles and thinks that she will take a different bus than his, he can only blame this movement that divides people into diverse directions: “I wished I was on her bus. A pain stabbed my heart, as it did every time I saw a

girl I loved who was going the opposite direction in this too-big world” (82). Women and movement are irrevocably confronted and the wanderers seem to be caught in a never-ending struggle between these two opposing forces. When Sal loses Terry, it is because of that uncontrollable movement he cannot stop – “I have to leave” (100). When Sal loses Lucille, it is again because of that movement that he refuses to abandon. “Ah, it’s all right, it’s just kicks. We only live once. We’re having a good time” (125) claims Sal, trying to justify himself in front of Lucille:

I knew my affair with Lucille wouldn’t last much longer. She wanted me to be her way. ... the whole thing was hopeless, besides which Lucille would never understand me because I like too many things and get all confused and hung-up running from one falling star to another till I drop.

(Kerouac, 125 - 126)

In spite of all these failures, settlement remains a major target in *On the Road*, condemning Sal and Dean to endlessly search and escape within the mad paradox of their restless wandering. How could it be possible to reach settlement and to continuously move around? By definition, the choice of a destination endangers the sustainability of movement, giving it an eventual closure at the end of the road. Searching for settlement through movement is inevitably doomed to fail and predestines the tragic fates of the lost travellers.

Searching for “it”: the inexpressible quest

“What was I doing? Where was I going? I’d soon find out” (Kerouac, 139). The paradoxes revolving around the protagonists’ lonesome wanderings are not the only obstacles preventing their searches to find their resolutions. Another main reason challenging the quest is the impossibility for the hero to define it. In *Into the Wild*, Chris never stops disserting about the metaphysical virtues that he is trying to reach through his journey. “Absolute truth” (Krakauer, 168), “freedom” (33) and “happiness” (107) are some of the ultimate goals at the end of McCandless’s road. By aiming towards those abstract concepts that a variety of philosophical, psychological and religious approaches have striven to identify for centuries, the young man gives a vague and imprecise direction to his journey. That unclearness revolving around the destination of the journey also appears in Kerouac’s *On the Road*. “Where go? what do? what for?” (Kerouac, 166), never stops wondering Sal Paradise throughout his journey. From the beginning of the novel, the young man is not able to identify a clear purpose to his journey. He wants to meet the gang in Denver, to find girls and to

escape from the intellectual milieu of his campus life. There is a whole series of reasons that can be juxtaposed but nothing seems to clearly stand out. Besides, every time Sal tries to express the general purpose at the end of his road, he is forced to use a metaphor: “Somewhere along the line I knew there’d be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me” (8). The image of the *pearl* appears again later in Kerouac’s narration. This time, Sal compares the country to an oyster that the two wanderers are restlessly trying to open: “He and I suddenly saw the whole country like an oyster for us to open; and the pearl was there, the pearl was there. Off we roared south. We picked up another hitchhiker” (138). The conceit illustrates again the difficulty – not to say impossibility – to use words in order to identify that final destination. Later in the novel, Dean Moriarty makes that difficulty explicit, naming “it” the endpoint of the journey:

“That Roll Greb is the greatest, most wonderful of all. ... Man, he’s the end! You see, if you go like him all the time you’ll finally get it.”

“Get what?”

“IT! IT! I’ll tell you - now no time, we have no time now”

(Kerouac, 127)

The use of the neuter pronoun to refer to the destination reveals its obscurity. The enigmatic concept is even less clear than truth, freedom or happiness. It is an admission of inexpressibility.

The impossibility to identify a clear goal at the end of the route can also be noticed by paying attention to the series of unanswered questions that are asked to Sal and Dean throughout their adventure. As Theado claims in *Understanding Jack Kerouac*, “Sal’s friends frequently ask him why he is on the road, and he never has a comfortable answer” (Theado, 59). Old Bull Lee keeps asking Sal the same question: “What are you going to the Coast for?” (Kerouac, 145, 154). He also interrogates Dean Moriarty on that matter, repeatedly telling him: “Now, Dean, I want you to sit quiet a minute and tell me what you’re doing crossing the country like this” (145). The only answer Dean can think of is: “Ah well, you know how it is” (145). Carlo Marx also tries to crack the secret of Sal and Dean’s voyage throughout America, asking them again that same question: “What is the meaning of this voyage to New York? ... I mean, man, whither goest thou? Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?” (119). Just as Old Bull, Carlo will never get an answer to his numerous questions, nothing but sighs, laughter and digressions:

“I just don’t know what you’re both driving at or trying to get at. I know it’s too much for anybody.”

“Everything you say is negative.”
“Then what is it you’re trying to do?”
“Tell him.”
”No, you tell him.”
“There’s nothing to tell,” I said and laughed.

(Kerouac, 48)

There is nothing to tell, nothing to comment, and around the end of novel, the unanswerable question even becomes comical: “‘Where you going, man?’ I turned to Dean, amazed. ‘Did you hear what she said?’” (277). The impossibility and refusal to define a destination gives to Sal and Dean’s journey an evasive reality, an unseizable meaning that both excites the two wanderers and deeply disturbs their static observers.

“They go! they go! I know that they go, but I know not where they go” (Whitman, 133). Sal and Dean are not the only ones moving without knowing – and without willing to know – where they are going. In *Into the Wild*, Chris is described as “a kid who was looking for something, ... just didn't know what it was” (Krakauer, 42); as a kid who went to Alaska, “[m]aybe to find whatever he was he was looking for” (42). In the same way, in Mark Twain’s novel, Huckleberry Finn’s drifts down the Mississippi river without knowing where his journey will lead. The boy surely knows he is trying to accompany a slave to the free states, but does not have the slightest idea about his personal destination. Besides, in the conclusive chapter of the novel, Huck decides to aim for the Territory, electing again a direction rather than any clear destination. These three road novels tell the story of a race without any finishing line. “Where would it all lead?” (Kerouac, 212) wonders Sal Paradise on several occasions. Sometimes the answer is “I didn’t care” (124); sometimes “nowhere” (128); sometimes “everywhere” (79). In “The Makings of Sal Paradise,” Michael Skau points out an interesting crossing out on the original scroll manuscript of *On the Road*. In the sentence “This madness would lead nowhere” (Kerouac, 128), Skau notices that “the word *nowhere* is crossed out, and the word *everywhere* is inserted instead” (Skau, 159). On the road, nowhere and everywhere are interchangeable. “[I]mpatiently going nowhere (Kerouac, 158), Sal and Dean are actually running everywhere, aimlessly wandering into an infinite realm of possibilities. As the narration confirms later: “There was nowhere to go but everywhere” (26). As the narration confirms later, movement is the wanderer’s only destination: “‘Whither goest thou?’ echoed Dean with his mouth open. We sat and didn’t know what to say. There was nothing to talk about any more. The only thing to do was go” (119).

Movement is a destination

“‘You boys going to get somewhere, or just going?’ We didn’t understand his question, and it was a damned good question” (Kerouac, 20). That question revolves around the three road novels of the corpus of this master’s thesis. More than running away or running after, *running* is the ultimate quest. In *Into the Wild*, the reader learns that Chris McCandless is a great runner, that the act of running itself, without any definite purpose or destination, is his favorite activity. As Jon Krakauer informs us: “It wasn’t until [Chris] took up running ... that he found his athletic calling” (Krakauer, 111). Besides, Krakauer adds that more than a sport, “McCandless viewed running as an intensely spiritual exercise, verging on religion” (112). That small narrative insight says a lot about the internal dynamic of Chris’s journey. The action of moving itself corresponds to the essence of the young man’s escapades. When Westerberg offers to buy Chris a plane ticket to Fairbank, the young man vehemently refuses: “No, I want to hitch north. Flying would be cheating. It would wreck the whole trip” (67). Like running, journeying is a game, a challenge with necessary rules. What actually matters is not to *be* in Fairbanks, but to *get* to Fairbanks. What matters is the path rather than the destination.

The same gap between the itinerary and the destination revolves around Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Not only Huck and Jim’s raft never reaches its destination – the free states of America –, but it actually never even aims towards it. As mentioned before, there is a complex paradox at the heart of Huck and Jim’s journey: Why are they going south to escape from slavery? Of course, the reader knows that the two runaways missed Cairo – the town at the mouth of the Ohio River –, which forced them to keep drifting south in the search of a canoe to go up the river. However, even knowing that, it cannot be denied that the situation remains slightly absurd and ironic. In chapter XX, that incongruity even allows Huckleberry to justify Jim’s presence on the raft by simply exposing the paradox: “Goodness sakes! would a runaway nigger run *south*?” (Twain, 127). The latent absurdity of the whole adventure finally peaks at the end of the novel, when Tom reveals to everyone that Jim was free from the beginning of the journey: “Old Miss Watson died two months ago, and she was ashamed she ever was going to sell him down the river, and *said* so; and she set him free in her will” (277). The farce finally sees the day: Huckleberry Finn was going south to free a slave already freed. Going south or going north, little it matters since the main concern is to *go*. There is only movement at the end of Huck’s river. Movement is the boy’s final destination and lighting out for the Territory at the end of the novel only rejoins his original

desire, the one he introduced at the beginning of the novel: “All I wanted was to go somewhere; all I wanted was a change” (12). Along the river, Huckleberry Finn found his perfect home. The more the novel advances, the more the raft drifts along and the more Huckleberry Finn seems to settle down on the Mississippi river:

It’s lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made or only just happened. ... Sometimes we’d have that whole river all to ourselves for the longest time.

(Twain, 120)

Besides, it can be noticed that Huck often uses the word “home” to qualify the raft of his river: “We got home all safe” (58) says the boy coming back from the floating house. At the beginning of chapter XIX, the meaningful association occurs again when Huckleberry delivers a long monologue about the advantages of living on a drifting raft: “[w]e said there warn’t no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don’t. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft” (118). As the novel advances, the journey progressively transforms itself into a welcoming residence, where Huckleberry Finn attempts to find shelter from a static and violent civilization.

“Home I’ll never be”

Jack Kerouac starts the second chapter of the fourth part of *On the Road* with “this little song”: “Home in Missoula, / Home in Truckee, / Home in Opelousas, / Ain’t no home for me. / Home in old Medora, / Home in Wounded Knee, / Home in Ogallala, / Home I’ll never be” (Kerouac, 255). When the journey becomes a moving home, its residents enters in a never-ending cycle of arrivals and departures. In “Song of the Open Road,” Walt Whitman celebrates the road as a living home and invites the traveller to keep moving on, in spite of the numerous temptations of the life off the road:

Allons! we must not stop here,
However sweet these laid-up stores, however convenient this dwelling we cannot
remain here,
However shelter’d this port and however calm these waters we must not anchor
here

(Whitman, 131)

In *Into the Wild*, Chris McCandless embraces Whitman’s advice and never stops arriving and

departing. “No phone, no pool, no pets, no cigarettes. Ultimate freedom. An extremist. An aesthetic voyager whose home is the road” (Krakauer, 163). Roger Miller’s ballad resonates throughout the narration. According to Chris, “there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun” (57). Even when the young adventurer finds a nice place to live in and lovely friends to stay with, he eventually needs to go back on the open road:

I will not be here in South Dakota very much longer. My friend, Wayne, wants me to stay working at the grain elevator through May and then go combining with him the entire summer, but I have my soul set entirely on my Alaskan Odyssey and hope to be on my way no later than April 15.

(Krakauer, 57)

Chris yet sometimes considers the eventuality to settle down, to stay in one place and to abandon his unpredictable life on the road: “I might finally settle down and abandon my tramping life, for good” says Chris when he arrived in Bullhead City where he settled down for more than two months. “I’ll see what happens when spring comes around, because that’s when I tend to get really itchy feet” (39). Of course, in spring, Chris is gone again.

“I was itching to get on to San Francisco” (Kerouac, 56). Like Chris McCandless, Sal Paradise has itchy feet and repeatedly declines the comfort and hospitality of sedentary life. As discussed earlier, the young man is constantly torn between his frantic wandering and his more reasonable desire to “rest [his] soul” (117) in one place. Like Chris who made a halt in Bullhead City, Sal once settles down in Denver for a while. However, suddenly inert, he expresses his desolation and describes himself as “lonesome”: “I went to Denver, thinking of settling down there. I saw myself in Middle America, a patriarch. I was lonesome” (179). Sal even goes as far as describing himself as dead: “*Down in Denver, down in Denver. All I did was die ... How I died! I walked away from there*” (181). Like stagnating water that starts rotting when it is not running, the journey cannot stop without endangering the life of its wanderer. Of course, Sal does not die in Denver. Just the way he left New York, Sabinal and San Francisco, he eventually gets bored and “pursue[s] [his] star further” (58):

My moments in Denver were coming to an end, I could feel it when I walked her home, on the way back I stretched out on the grass of an old church with a bunch of hobos, and their talk made me want to get back on that road.

(Kerouac, 58)

A similar pattern, articulating embarking and disembarking, can be noticed in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In Mark Twain's novel, the young boy fragments his journey on the Mississippi by making several stopovers on the river benches, but systematically ends up disappointed and going back to his homelike raft. Pulled forward by hope and pulled from behind by deception, the "aesthetic voyager[s]" (Krakauer, 163) of those road novels suffer from a strange condition – perhaps the same one that Hans Christian Andersen identified as "outsickness" in 1856.¹⁹ Doomed to move, the lost wanderers take up residence on the road and cloister themselves in a never-ending cycle of arrivals and departures.

A circular, springily, jazzy, journey

In *On the Road*, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty are caught in a never-ending pattern, going from one city to another, from one woman to the other, from frantic excitement to inevitable boredom. That cyclic repetition embraces a major theme in Jack Kerouac's novel: circularity. Sal and Dean's trips occur indeed on a cyclic basis, following the rhythm of the seasons. Spring is presented as the perfect moment to start the wandering. It is "the great time of traveling" (Kerouac, 6), when "everybody in the scattered gang [is] getting ready to take one trip or another" (6). The third and fourth part of *On the Road* thus start with new cycles of springily adventures: "In the spring of 1949, ... I went to Denver" (179) / "Whenever spring comes to New York I can't stand the suggestions of the land ... and I've got to go. So I went" (249). If spring initiates departure, it seems that fall and winter systematically triggers a short period of rest. "I was going home in October" says Sal Paradise. "Everybody goes home in October" (102); and so does Chris McCandless in *Into the Wild*. Indeed, it can be noticed that Chris's adventures are also ruled by the regular rhythm of the seasons of the year: "[Bullhead City] is a good place to spend the winter I'll see what happens when spring comes around, because that's when I tend to get really itchy feet" (Krakauer, 39). The recurring seasons of the year dictate the cadence of the wanderers' journey and create a never-ending pattern that may remind the circular course of the sun around the globe.

In *On the Road*, Sal and Dean do not only travel in cycles, but also in circles. The theme of circularity therefore both has a temporal and a spatial reality. Although Sal Paradise

¹⁹ In a letter from 1856, Hans Christian Andersen opposes "homesickness" to "outsickness": "Homesickness is a feeling that many know and suffer from; I on the other hand feel a pain less known, and its name is "Outsickness." When the snow melts, the stork arrives, and the first steamships race off, then I feel the painful travel unrest" (Jens Andersen, 266).

first describes his dreamed journey as westward and linear – trying “to follow one great red line across America” (Kerouac, 11) and being sure that “[s]omewhere along the line ... there’d be girls, visions, everything, [that] somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to [him]” (8) – he eventually finds himself stuck at the end of his line, still looking for the uncatchable pearl:

How disastrous all this was compared to what I’d written him from Paterson, planning my red line Route 6 across America. Here I was at the end of America - no more land - and now there was nowhere to go but back. I determined at least to make my trip a circular one

(Kerouac, 77)

The reader quickly understands that Sal’s wandering cannot simply stop and that it will survive to the Californian coast, just as the frontier myth did not vanish from American culture the day the pioneers reached the Pacific Ocean. When there is “nowhere to go but back” (77), Sal and Dean twist the red line and head back with the same frenzy, making the journey “a circular one” (77) and therefore engaging themselves into an eternal loop. The same assessment in front of the oceanic fence occurs indeed on several occasions during the novel – “No more land! We can’t go any further ‘cause there ain’t no more land!” (169) / “there was no more land, just the Atlantic Ocean” (248) – but the two-ways trips system allows movement to survive and makes the journey an endless circuit, “a sewing circle” (193) around America. Besides, it can be noticed that Sal’s initial plan was to “ship out with [his friend Remi Boncoeur] on an around-the-world liner” (9) and therefore to let the line transform itself into a circle.²⁰ Facing the ocean, Sal found an alternative to navigating around the world. Facing the ocean, Sal turned back and started travelling from one coast to the other, making a globe of America.

It can be noticed that the theme of circularity also has a spatial reality in Jon Krakauer and Mark Twain’s novels. Although it is less apparent and recurrent than in *On the Road*, Chris McCandless also cloisters himself in an endless loop during his adventures; “travelling in circles” (Krakauer, 35), “tramping around Arizona” (33), buying a canoe, then moving “across the Southwest, travelling as far east as Houston and as far west as the Pacific coast” (37). That part of his adventures occurs before his great odyssey to Alaska and can be summarized as a series of round-trips trips throughout the American West. Finally, one may

²⁰ As Deleuze and Guattari say in *A Thousand Plateaus*, “America reversed the directions: it put its Orient in the West, as if it were precisely in America that the earth came full circle; its West is the edge of the East” (Deleuze – Guattari, 21).

say that Huckleberry Finn somehow also follows an endless circle in Mark Twain's novel. The Mississippi river – that “is the greatest character” (Trilling, 285) of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* according to Lionel Trilling – can indeed be read as a moving loop made of flowing and travelling water. “What is the Mississippi River?” asks Sal Paradise in *On the Road*. According to him, the Mississippi is “a riding of the tide down the eternal waterbed, a contribution to brown foams, a voyaging past endless vales and trees and leaves, down along, down along” (Kerouac, 156). Like a circle made of voyaging stories, the Mississippi does not have an end or a beginning. Besides, in “The Boy and the River: Without Beginning or End,” T. S. Eliot establishes a link between that characteristics and the unframed narration of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: “[l]ike *Huckleberry Finn*, the river itself has no beginning or end” (Eliot, 288). The expression may also remind a line from Walt Whitman's “Song of the Open Road”: “Allons! to that which is endless as it was beginningless” (Whitman, 133). It may finally recall Deleuze and Guattari's theory about the “line of becoming” (Deleuze - Guattari, 293):

[A] line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination [. . .]. A line of becoming has only a middle. The middle is not an average; it is fast motion, it is the absolute speed of movement"

(Deleuze - Guattari, 293).

If circularity certainly is a central theme in *On the Road*, it can also be identified as a major topic in *Into the Wild*, *Adventures of Huckleberry* and – in a more general way – in the genre of American road literature. Indeed, Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*, Robbins's *Even Cowgirls get the Blues* and Heat-Moon's *Blue Highways* also tell the story of circular trips across America. There is yet one crucial difference between the circles of those two corpuses: some are complete, and some are not.

Circularity is intrinsically linked to another major theme of *On the Road* that Theado refers to as “the beating heart of *On the Road*” (Theado, 58). Jazz music – that Sal and Dean never stop listening to throughout their adventure – is based on a cyclic, repetitive and malleable system that makes it both random and regular – which allows different musicians to improvise together. As Tim Cresswell notices in “Mobility as Resistance: A Geographical Reading of Kerouac's *On the Road*,” jazz music perfectly accompanies the narrative development of the novel, for both are based on indefinite repetitions of a “reworked, redefined and re-explored” (Cresswell, 256) original form:

An important thing to remember about jazz is that it is based on a repetition of a

series of chord changes. The repeated forms are reworked, redefined and re-explored with each rendition. The motion of this form is not linear but circular with the players constantly returning to the same point and trying again.

(Cresswell, 256)

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one of the first meanings of “jazz” was “[e]nergy, excitement, ‘pep’; restlessness; animation, excitability” (oed). Just like Sal and Dean’s journey, playing jazz does not seem to have a beginning or an end. It is an eternal repetition of a never-changing journey, probably trying to find something, to get somewhere, without ever succeeding. What is jazz but “running from one falling star to another” (Kerouac, 126)?

Jazz does not only accompany *On the Road* on a narrative point of view. It also influences the style and the structure of Kerouac’s novel. As Tim Cresswell claims in his article, “*On the Road* takes jazz music as its central structural metaphor” (Cresswell, 256). The unpredictable rhythm, loose structure and lack of punctuation of Kerouac’s writing seem to be in a perfect harmony with the unbridled music genre:

Slim sits down at the piano and hits two notes, two Cs, then two more, then one, then two, and suddenly the big burly bass-player wakes up from a reverie and realizes Slim is playing “C-Jam Blues” and he slugs in his big forefinger on the string and the big booming beat begins and everybody starts rocking and Slim looks up just as sad as ever, and they blow jazz for half an hour, and then Slim goes mad and grabs the bongos and plays tremendous rapid Cubana beats and yells crazy things in Spanish, in Arabic, in Peruvian dialect, in Egyptian, in every language he knows, and he knows innumerable languages.

(Kerouac, 177)

This extract is made of only one sentence. The frantic rhythm of the Kerouac’s phrasing fits the cadence of jazz music. Besides, it can be noticed that one of the several meanings of the word “jazz” defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is “[u]nnecessary, misleading, or excessive talk; nonsense, rubbish” (oed). Considering the definition, one may say that *On the Road* is full of “jazz”:

Just as we passed that other lamp I was going to tell you a further thing, Sal, but now I am parenthetically continuing with a new thought and by the time we reach the next I’ll return to the original subject, agreed?

(Kerouac, 248)

Parentheses, digressions and afterthoughts never stop nourishing the dialogues of *On the Road*. The speech goes round and round in circles, just like the journey of the two wanderers.

“The zigzagging of the plot is matched by the zigzagging of the language” (Cresswell, 256) suggests Tim Cresswell in his article. There is an episode where Sal is desperately trying to sleep while Dean and Carlo are caught in a never-ending and unintelligible discussion. There again, speech takes the shape of a circular road, without end or beginning and constantly repeating itself throughout the night. “I had spent the whole night listening to them like a man watching the mechanism of a watch” (Kerouac, 50) says Sal. The simile with the mechanism of the watch stresses the idea of an unstoppable machine:

“We’ll just have to sleep now. Let’s stop the machine.”
“You can’t stop the machine!” yelled Carlo at the top of his voice. The first birds sang.
“Now, when I raise my hand,” said Dean, “we’ll stop talking, we’ll both understand purely and without any hassle that we are simply stopping talking, and we’ll just sleep.”
“You can’t stop the machine like that.”
“Stop the machine,” I said. They looked at me.

(Kerouac, 49)

The jazzy impulsivity and spontaneity that rule the narration become even more obvious by reading the original manuscript of Kerouac’s novel. In that first draft, grammar and punctuations do not matter. Even the very first sentence of the book is grammatically incorrect: “I first met met Neal not long after my father died” (Kerouac, *Original*, 1). The force of Kerouac’s writing probably resides in that unblocked energy detached from any complex and apprehension. As Dean tells Sal at the beginning of the novel: “there’s so many things to do, so many things to write! How to even begin to get it all down and without modified restraints and all hung-up on like literary inhibitions and grammatical fears” (Kerouac, 4). It is clearly Jack Kerouac – that the reader is allowed to imagine cloistered in his apartment, frantically typing this single spaced scroll, without margins or paragraph breaks – speaking through Dean’s speech here. Jazz, circularity, spontaneity and eternity seems to work in a perfect harmony throughout *On the Road*, organizing all the plot, style and structure of Kerouac’s novel. Imprisoned in an endless series of jazzy improvisations, Sal and Dean dance the American road through the years, to the point of exhaustion.

Caught in a vicious circle: movement and addiction

How getting out from the “circle” (Kerouac, 193)? Living in a pattern they made for themselves, the wanderers of the road novels of this corpus seem to be imprisoned in their own creation. In *On the Road*, Sal and Dean are progressively cloistered in the series of

“[c]oast-to-coast excursions” (Theado, 60) that they initiated. As long as the loop remains intact, there is no way out from the aimless wandering. The more the novel advances, the more the addictive and dangerous dimension of movement becomes apparent. During one of his numerous trips to New York, Sal compares himself to a “travelling salesman” (Kerouac, 247) crossing and re-crossing the country for eternity:

I realized I was beginning to cross and re-cross towns in America as though I were a traveling salesman - raggedy travelings, bad stock, rotten beans in the bottom of my bag of tricks, nobody buying.

(Kerouac, 247)

Sal’s route has become a routine that cannot be interrupted. “[T]he road drives [him]” (279) rather than the opposite. Whereas he was naively trying to reach independence through movement at the beginning of his journey, he progressively became addicted to movement. The “itchy feet” that were discussed before – in both *On the Road* and *Into the Wild* – can besides be interpreted as a physical manifestation of the wanderer’s addiction to movement. There is something that repeatedly comes back, a recurring itching that never disappears and that cannot leave the traveller in peace:

Suddenly we came down from the mountain and overlooked the great sea-plain of Denver; heat rose as from an oven. We began to sing songs. I was itching to get on to San Francisco.

(Kerouac, 56)

On the American road, the never-leaving itching pushes the wanderer to constantly move, to act as reckless junkie ignoring his condition, confined and caught in a violent mechanism he engaged on his own.

It can be noticed that like for any kind of addiction, Sal and Dean’s desire for movement never meets saturation: “There’s always more, a little further - it never ends” (Kerouac, 243), says Sal Paradise. There is no end to the use of movement and the wanderer can only dream of more. Dean Moriarty is the first victim of that search for unsaturable passions and desires. The young man accumulates cities, drugs and wives without fixing himself any limit. A good example of Dean’s insatiability is his restless desire to steal cars. Indeed, the bandit “stole five hundred cars” (224) in one year, only for the sake of riding: “You see what I do with them, I just wanta ride, man! I gotta go!” (224). Moreover, even the circular shape of the two men’s journey that allow them to bulimically move around is not enough for Dean Moriarty. The starving man that Sal once compares to “Gargantuan” (259)

does not even find satisfaction in that infinite circle and wants to stretch it even further; to go to Italy, to go to Mexico, to “go right on to South America if the road goes” (276), to roam all the routes of the world until exhaustion:

Do you know there's a road that goes down Mexico and all the way to Panama? - and maybe all the way to the bottom of South America where the Indians are seven feet tall and eat cocaine on the mountainside? Yes! You and I, Sal, we'd dig the whole world with a car like this because, man, the road must eventually lead to the whole world.

(Kerouac, 231)

Dean Moriarty who insatiably steals cars and who has been “working on the railroad” (110) embodies movement and has always been addicted to it. “All [Dean] needed was a wheel in his hand and four on the road” (Kerouac, 210-211). He is a son of the road, who was actually “born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles.” (1). If Dean has always been itching to move; Sal only “got on that old road” (43) at the beginning of the novel. Initiated by Dean Moriarty, he then progressively immersed himself within the dangerous circle of wandering.

Sal Paradise “sheepishly” (Kerouac, 114) follows Dean Moriarty throughout *On the Road*: “I didn't want to interfere, I just wanted to follow” (132) / “I am always ready to follow Dean” (262). Shadowing Dean somehow plunged the young man into a “swirl” (5) a violent spin whose force never cease to increase: “The whole mad swirl of everything that was to come began then” (5). At the beginning of the second part of *On the Road*, Sal Paradise is back at his aunt's house, finishing his book, “going to school on the GI Bill of Rights” (109) and celebrating Christmas with his Southern relatives. The young man seems to have freed himself from the dangerous circle. However, the rehab only lasts until the tempting movement-dealer comes back again at the wheel of his '49 Hudson, interrupting Sal's recovered sedentary life, proposing him to go for another kick:

[A] mud-spattered '49 Hudson drew up in front of the house on the dirt road. I had no idea who it was. A weary young fellow, muscular and ragged in a T-shirt, unshaven, red-eyed, came to the porch and rang the bell. I opened the door and suddenly realized it was Dean.

(Kerouac, 109)

Like a sickness, movement addiction seems to be contagious and Dean progressively transmitted Sal a “bug”: “I was beginning to get the bug like Dean” (4). Lucille – one of the numerous women who loses against movement in *On the Road* – “sense[s] the madness

[Dean and Marylou] put in [Sal]" (125) as soon as she sees him with them. Like a junkie entering into a community, Sal describes "the sordid hipsters of America" as "a new beat generation that [he is] slowly joining" (54). That bug, that terrible itching, repeatedly appears during the novel. After Sal has seen the Hudson on that Christmas night, he has the bug again and goes back to movement, into the mad swirl of Dean Moriarty:

I had been spending a quiet Christmas in the country, as I realized when we got back into the house and I saw the Christmas tree, the presents, and smelled the roasting turkey and listened to the talk of the relatives, but now the bug was on me again, and the bug's name was Dean Moriarty and I was off on another spurt around the road.

(Kerouac, 115)

In the first paragraph of this master's thesis, we quoted Ronald Primeau, describing Dean as a "redeemer [who] freed Sal to be himself, taught him the requisite of madness, and helped him formulate his paradoxical combination of optimism and social protest (Primeau, 43). Another way of looking at *On the Road* could be to identify Dean as Sal's pusher, dealer and intoxicator.²¹

Even though Huckleberry Finn's adventure is not as unbridled and hedonist as the one told in *On the Road*, the theme of addiction can be suggested in Mark Twain's novel. In the conclusive chapter of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, it is hard for the reader to understand Huck's final decision to light out for the Territory. At the end of his river, Huck has finally found a family and a peaceful environment where he can finally settle down. He has also discovered that Jim is a free slave and that Pap is a dead corpse floating at the top of the river. All these elements would seem to lead to a conclusive settlement and it is difficult to identify the reasons that justify Huck's decision to keep moving further. Huck staying at the Phelps's family would have been a "logical" ending, an expected and more traditional resolution for the storyline. However, the young boy goes back again on the road and does not give any clear justification except from: "Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it" (Twain, 281). At the end of the novel, Huck abandons everything – Jim, Pap, Tom, the Widow Douglas, Miss Watson, Judge Thatcher, the Phelps family, the raft, the Mississippi river – but does not quit movement. Leaving the flow of the Mississippi, Huck breaks a circle, but only to engage himself into another one. "I can stop anywhere I want to.

²¹ The parallel between movement and addiction could also be made by paying attention to the presence of drugs in *On the Road*. Although they are rarely explicitly associated in the novel, drugs and movement seem to share a same aura. Both condemn their users to an endless series of cycles going from envy, to climatic enjoyment, to boredom and decadence.

Jackson's Island is good enough for me" (41) naively claimed Huck Finn at the beginning of his odyssey. One could be allowed to say that *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* tells the beginning of a terrible addiction to movement. One century later, it is that same obsession that seems to command Sal, Dean and Chris's dangerous wanderings on the road.

Although less omnipresent than in *On the Road*, the theme of addiction is suggested by several elements in Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. First, there is that constant "need [that Chris has] to test himself" (Krakauer, 182), that recurring desire to push "risk-taking to its logical extreme" (182). Then there is that "itching," that strong feeling that repeatedly puts him in a position where he "must return to road immediately" (37). Moving is an impulse that cannot find calming down. Moreover, like a junkie who tragically dies from an overdose just before becoming clean, Chris McCandless perishes on the road just before quitting movement. "[T]his Alaska escapade" was indeed going to be "his last big adventure" (66) and Jon Krakauer suggests that the wanderer was perhaps finally ready to "return[...] to civilization, ... to abandon the life of a solitary vagabond, [to] stop running so hard from intimacy, and [to] become a member of the human community" (189):

Satisfied, apparently, with what he had learned during his two months of solitary life in the wild, McCandless decided to return to civilization. It was time to bring his "final and greatest adventure" to a close and get himself back to the world of men and women, where he could chug a beer, talk philosophy, enthrall strangers with tales of what he'd done. ... McCandless seemed ready, perhaps, to go home.

(Krakauer, 168)

Bringing his journey "to a close" (168) would have implied finally breaking the circle, abandoning movement and accepting a life of inertia within civilization. However, that trip to Alaska was Chris's game too much, a last kick that turned out to be fatal.

Captive and victim of the wild road

Here are the very first lines of Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*:

In April 1992, a young man from a well-to-do East Coast family hitchhiked to Alaska and walked alone into the wilderness north of Mt. McKinley. Four months later his decomposed body was found by a party of moose hunters.

(Krakauer, i).

Unlike Sean Penn's cinematographic adaptation, Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* does not play

with suspense in his narration. The writer chose indeed to reveal the tragic denouement of Chris's journey from the beginning of the novel, perhaps to allow the reader to approach the story with an appropriate perspective. *Into the Wild* is a tragedy, a dramatic non-fiction story where movement and nature play the role of the assassin. "The famous 'escape' or 'run away from it all' is an excursion into a trap" claim Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet in *Dialogues II*, (Deleuze – Parnet, 38). At the end of his escapade, Chris is a prisoner, an agonizing prey trapped on the road. As he admits himself: "Death looms as serious threat. Too weak to walk out, have literally become trapped in the wild. –No game" (Krakauer, 195). The young man who always considered the road as a game – imposing himself handicaps and arguing that "[f]lying would be cheating" (67) – eventually realizes that he has become nothing but a victim and captive of the wild road. It is indeed nature that sentenced the modern pioneer to death. Misidentifying poisonous wild sweet peas for wild potatoes, Chris somehow was killed by his best friend. The young man who did not want to be "poisoned by civilization" (163) any longer ended up being poisoned by wilderness. It can also be noticed that it is nature again that imprisons Chris in his sanctuary minibus and therefore condemns him to a long and painful death. It is indeed a snow-melt swollen river that prevents him from rejoining the trail leading to civilization:

When he'd first crossed the river, sixty-seven days earlier in the freezing temperatures of April, it had been an icy but gentle knee-deep creek, and he'd simply strolled across it. On July 5, however, the Teklanika was at full flood, swollen with rain and snowmelt from glaciers high in the Alaska Range, running cold and fast.

(Krakauer, 169)

The river materializes the American frontier and forces Chris to "turn[...] around" and to "walk[...] to the west" for a very last time, "back toward the bus, back into the fickle heart of the bush" (171). Literally poisoned and imprisoned into the wild, Chris McCandless ironically and tragically spends his last days in a broken down minibus.

Dying in movement: the impossible sequel to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

The tragic dimension of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is definitely less apparent than in *On the Road* and *Into the Wild*. However, the puzzling conclusion of the novel may allow the reader to interpret Huck's journey as a tragedy. As discussed before, much ink has been spilled on that unexpected ending. Many post-war literary critics have indeed judged Tom

Sawyer's come back and the two revelations of the last chapter deeply problematic. According to most of them, these concluding elements were disappointing, for they created a dissonance with the serious and humanist message conveyed by the entire novel. As Leo Marx wrote in "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huckleberry Finn" in 1953:

It is true that we do discover, in the end, that Jim is free, but we also find out that the journey was not the means by which he finally reached freedom. ... The conclusion, in short, is farce, but the rest of the novel is not.

(Marx, 353-354)

For many modern academics, Mark Twain's conclusion is nothing but deeply negative. As explained before, critics such as Prioleau, Reesman or Donaldson consider the optimistic reading of the last chapter "idealistic" (Reesman, 176). According to Donaldson, Huck did not succeed to free his friend Jim and did not even manage to escape from his father. According to Elizabeth Prioleau in "'That Abused Child of Mine': Huck Finn as the Child of an Alcoholic," the reader leaves the boy "in a more demoralized, 'mournful' condition than at the beginning" (Prioleau, 91). In "Bad Fathering in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*," Jeanne Campbell Reesman contributes to the pessimistic interpretation of the ending of the novel, arguing that Mark Twain's travel narrative "is not a typical Western hero myth or *Bildungsroman*, and it does not have a happy ending" (Reesman, 177):

Huck does not change; he is not redeemed; he does not learn that the truth makes men free; and he is not conscious of being saved at all. These are the wishful thoughts of the reader.

(Reesman, 176-177)

One may say that Huckleberry's final decision to "light out for the Territory" (Twain, 281) is the proof of an angst that never found its resolution. Jim might be free and Pap might be dead, but the boy's descent to "hell" (208) actually did not change anything about it. Pursuing his initial escape from "sivilization," Huckleberry confirms that he did not succeed to find peace and to rest his soul. He surely abandons his raft, but tragically keeps drifting, aiming everywhere, going nowhere. Besides, it can be noticed that Mark Twain "obsessively" tried to write "numerous sequels to *Huckleberry Finn*" (Lynn, 245). One of those desperate attempts to give an end to Huckleberry's road was *Huck Finn & Tom Sawyer Among the Indians*. However, that sequel – and all the others – where Huck Finn perhaps would have reached his last frontier never found the day:

Fifteen thousand words into the work, Twain stopped in the middle of a sentence, never to go back; the unfinished story sitting on dusty shelves for more than a hundred years

(Council Press, Back cover)

Like *Huck Finn & Tom Sawyer Among the Indians*, Huck's final escape is doomed to fail. Like Chris McCandless and Dean Moriarty, Huckleberry Finn somehow died in movement.

The fall of Dean Moriarty

In *Dialogues II*, Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet claim that “a flight is a sort of delirium” (Deleuze – Parnet, 40) and wonder “how can one avoid the line of flight's becoming – a pure and simple movement of self-destruction” (Deleuze - Parnet, 50). One may say that insanity is an inevitable consequence to frantic wandering. Endlessly travelling along a circle can only lead to what John D. Seelye names a “wander-madness” (Seelye, 538). The tragic dimension of *On the Road* is unveiled when the addiction to movement becomes devastating and condemns Dean Moriarty to a degenerating madness, transformation, fall and perdition. Sal has been fascinated by Dean's madness from the beginning of the novel, claiming that “the only people for [him] are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved” (Kerouac, 5). However, the “silly madness” (119) never stops growing, and as Ed Dunkel warns Sal, “[t]he days of wrath are yet to come. The balloon won't sustain you much longer” (130). It can be noticed that the prophecy keeps repeating itself throughout the novel. As Galatea Dunkel once foretells: “[s]omeday Dean's going to go on one of these trips and never come back” (204). As the novel advances, Dean's “iron fate” (257) appears unavoidable, progressively taking shape within his self-destructive madness. As the proverb says: “Travel makes a wise man better, and a fool worst” (Fuller, 229).²²

Recklessly wandering in circles, Dean Moriarty's insanity gradually grows, intensifies itself and becomes physically apparent. The more Dean roams the road, the more he “sweat[s] and sweat[s]” (Kerouac, 247); the more he reddens and looses control: “He was sweating. His eyes were red-streaked and mad” (279). The tragic evolution and transformation seems unstoppable and goes as far as challenging Dean's humanity. “All the bitterness and madness of his entire Denver life was blasting out of his system like daggers. His face was red and sweaty and mean” (222). One of the most fascinating examples Dean's physical degradation

²² Proverb listed in Thomas Fuller's *Gnomologia: A Collection of the Proverbs, Maxims and Adages That Inspired Benjamin Franklin and Poor Richard's Almanack*.

in *On the Road* is the putrefaction of his “infected thumb” (189). At the beginning of the third part of the novel, Sal learns that Dean hurt his hand trying to hit Marylou for sleeping with other men. He barely touched her but broke his thumb and developed a chronic “osteomyelitis” (186) – infection of the bone. Dean is then described by Sal as a repulsive animal wandering around, “with his broken thumb wrapped in a huge white bandage sticking up like a beacon that stands motionless above the frenzy of the waves” (187-188):

He was wearing a T-shirt, torn pants hanging down his belly, tattered shoes; he had not shaved, his hair was wild and bushy, his eyes bloodshot, and that tremendous bandaged thumb stood supported in midair at heart-level (he had to hold it up that way), and on his face was the goofiest grin I ever saw.

(Kerouac, 188)

A serial hitchhiker with an infected thumb... It is difficult to ignore the irony of the situation. The rotten thumb reflects Dean’s state and symbolizes his devastating movement on the road. As Sal himself confirms “[t]his thumb became the symbol of Dean’s final development” (188). At the beginning of Tom Robbins’s *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, Sissy Kankshaw is described with enormously large thumbs. The young woman considers a deformation to be a gift and thus decides to become a hitchhiker. In *On the Road*, Dean Moriarty recklessly moves to the excess and thus ends up with a broken infected thumb. The more the road is roamed, the more Dean’s thumb putrefies in its bandage. Toward the end of the novel, “Dean’s thumb bandage [is] almost as black as coal and all unrolled” (Kerouac, 244). From the beginning of the third part of *On the Road* – which is around the center of the narration – Dean Moriarty’s fall never ceases. Whereas the first part of the journey was dreamlike, full of hope, kicks and possibilities, the second one gradually reveals itself to be a “senseless nightmare” (253).

During that second part of the novel, Sal progressively realizes that he has lost his paradise and admits the “the raggedy madness and riot of [their] actual lives” (Kerouac, 253). He also realizes that Dean Moriarty “perhaps” (193) is the culprit of all this insanity: “It wasn’t anything but a sewing circle, and the center of it was the culprit, Dean - responsible, perhaps, for everything that was wrong” (193). At the end of part four, after Dean abandoned him in Mexico whereas he was suffering from dysentery, Sal sees “what a rat” (302) his best friend is. Although he forgives him – “understand[ing] the impossible complexity of his life” (302) – he eventually forsakes him. At the beginning of part five, Sal meets Laura. “We agreed to love each other madly” (304) confesses the future ex-wanderer. The expression is beautiful, surprising and meaningful. The use of the word “madly” may besides remind the

reader of that madness that was closely related to the road. As discussed before, movement and women never ceased to confront each other during Sal's journey. At the end of the narrative, Sal replaces mad movement with mad love. He closes the circle of his narrative journey, which started with the divorce from his first wife and ends up with the meeting of his second one. At the beginning of *On the Road*, Sal said that his "life hanging around the campus had reached the completion of its cycle" (7). At the end of *On the Road*, he seems to draw the same conclusion about his life wandering around America. As for Dean Moriarty, he remains alone on the road, without his best and last companion. Friendship and camaraderie on the road are at the center of Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road." The poem thus concludes itself with the following series of questions:

Camerado, I give you my hand! ...
Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

(Whitman, 135)

In *On the Road*, Sal's final answer is "no." When Dean asks him to accompany him for another kick, Sal refuses, saying that he is not "going to start all over again" (Kerouac, 306). At the end of the novel the two men who "clasped hands and agreed to be friends forever" (248) in front of the Atlantic Ocean split their road and their destiny.

Without the friend who was initially supposed to "show [him] how to write" (Kerouac, 6), Dean Moriarty progressively forgets how to speak. When Sal sees him again at the very end of the novel, the mad preacher has become dumb:

He couldn't talk any more. He hopped and laughed, he stuttered and fluttered his hands and said, «Ah - ah - you must listen to hear.» We listened, all ears. But he forgot what he wanted to say.

(Kerouac, 304)

Everyone actually stopped listening to Dean Moriarty before he stopped talking. At the beginning of part three, just after he broke his thumb, Dean is surrounded by girls "and just talk[s], and talk[s], and talk[s], with a voice that was once hypnotic" (194). That episode is another pivotal moment of the novel, for the girls just "[look] at Dean the way a mother looks at the dearest and most errant child, and he with his sad thumb"(195). Secluded in his madness, with only Sal – for the time being – to support him, Dean "[stands] on the carpet in the middle of them and giggle[s] - he just giggle[s]" (194). As Sal notices, he has become "the Idiot, the Imbecile, the Saint of the lot" (194), "the HOLY GOOF" (194). Sal Paradise often described Dean Moriarty as an angel during his narration – "the angel had arrived and he was

going mad again” (182). At the end of the road, the mad angel violently falls:

I had a vision of Dean, a burning shuddering frightful Angel, palpitating toward me across the road, approaching like a cloud, with enormous speed ... I saw his huge face over the plains with the mad, bony purpose and the gleaming eyes; I saw his wings; I saw his old jalopy chariot with thousands of sparking flames shooting out from it; I saw the path it burned over the road; it even made its own road and went over the corn, through cities, destroying bridges, drying rivers. It came like wrath to the West. I knew Dean had gone mad again.

(Kerouac, 259)

A parallel between Dean Moriarty and the Bible’s falling angel seems legitimate and is besides made explicit by Sal Paradise himself who once laments: “Poor, poor Dean - the devil himself had never fallen farther” (189). Falling was Dean’s inevitable fate. As Tim Cresswell asserts in his article, “Kerouac’s joyous exploration of the American road is destined to end in death” (Cresswell, 258). When Sal was still caught in the endless circle of wandering, he naively said: “I like too many things and get all confused and hung-up running from one falling star to another till I drop” (Kerouac, 125-126). As foreseen by everyone, Dean Moriarty finally drops at the end of Kerouac’s novel. Like Icarus who recklessly flew towards the sun, the mythical cowboy progressively burnt himself on the road and tragically fell to his doom.

Flying dutchmen

The tragic image of the wanderer doomed to move around for eternity may remind the myth of “The Flying Dutchman.” In that legend – which was adapted and interpreted many times within the course of art history – a captain and his crew are doomed to sail the oceans forever on a ship named “The Flying Dutchman.” It seems that at one time or another, Huck, Sal, Dean and Chris all joined the crew of the legendary ghost-ship. The only one that seems to have escaped from the curse is Sal Paradise – although there is no means to actually check Sal’s destiny beyond the frame of the novel. In the last part of *On the Road*, Sal succeeds to break the circle by settling down with Laura. That resolution may remind again the legend of “The Flying Dutchman.” In the latter, the cursed captain is allowed to make port once in a long while – once every seven years in Wagner’s opera²³ – and can use this halt to redeem

²³ “The term is up. Once more the seven years have run their course – The jaded sea casts me upon the shore” (Wagner, 51)

himself. If the Dutchman finds a wife during that visit on the shore, he will be released from his curse:

Like an arrow he flies, without aim, without aim, without hope! –
One chance remains to gain this poor man his peace and salvation,
only a woman true unto death can bring him redemption! –
Ah, haunted man, who can tell when you'll find her?
May God in Heaven grant you a wife faithful and true.

(Wagner, 60)

That extract from Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* is sang by Senta, the woman who decided to save the poor sailor. At the end of the opera, "[s]he throws herself into the sea" to prove her faithful love to him. At that same moment, "the Dutchman's ship sinks with all hands into the waves. ... In the red glow of the rising sun, Senta and the Dutchman, transfigured, are seen, in a close embrace, rising from the wreck of the vessel, and soaring upwards" (Wagner, 77). Like a cursed sailor of the Flying Dutchman, Sal Paradise eventually finds his own Senta and abandons his mad captain at the wheel of the flying ghost-ship.

Sal Paradise's mad and mutual love for Laura eventually redeems him. The curse is released and Sal does not have to sail anymore. He leaves his flying captain on the road, now mad and mute, endlessly looking for his pearl. That last image may remind another lonesome and mad captain from American literature. Herman Melville's Ahab somehow is another victim of movement. Throughout *Moby Dick*, the captain of the Pequod desperately sails the oceans looking for his white whale – who is besides characterized by feminine pronouns throughout the narration –, and drags Ishmael along with him in his madness. It can be noticed that the character of Ishmael shares many similarities with the one of Sal Paradise. Just like the latter, Ishmael starts his narration by exposing his desire to take off, "to get to sea" (Melville, 23), to "sail about a little and see the watery part of the world" (Melville, 23). As for the parallel between Dean Moriarty and Captain Ahab – whose ivory leg never stops treading upon the decks of the Pequod –, it is made explicit by Sal himself at the end of *On the Road*:

As a seaman I used to think of the waves rushing beneath the shell of the ship and the bottomless deeps there under - now I could feel the road some twenty inches beneath me, unfurling and flying and hissing at incredible speeds across the groaning continent with that mad Ahab at the wheel.

(Kerouac, 235)

It can be noticed that Captain Ahab is also present in the narration of *Into the Wild*. In a "graffito found inside the abandoned bus" (Krakauer, 38), the words were inscribed: "All hail

the Dominant Primordial Beast! And Captain Ahab Too!” (38). One may say that Captain Ahab somehow was another American Dutchman, another mad wanderer addicted to movement and obsessed with an uncatchable pearl, “it,” whale; whatever its name is. At the end of *Moby Dick*, Ahab destroys his own ship and sentences his crew to death. Like in *On the Road*, there is one last man standing at the end of the journey. Here it is Ishmael, who like Sal Paradise assumes the task to tell the tragedy: “The drama’s done. Why then here does any one step forth?—Because one did survive the wreck” (Melville, 723)²⁴. As for Ahab, he dies while trying to throw a last harpoon to the white whale. Whereas “[t]he harpoon was darted; the stricken whale flew forward” and the line “caught [Ahab] round the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone” (Melville, 721-722). Like Dean Moriarty, Ahab dies “mute[...] and “voiceless[...],” strangled by the violence of an uncontrollable movement. Like Dean Moriarty, Ahab dies doomed to keep moving, his ghostly corpse dragged by the white whale, continuing its journey throughout the abyss of the ocean.

Becoming a ghost of the road

The physical descriptions of Chris McCandless during the last days of his wandering are horrifying: “Can this be the same Alex that set out in July, 1990? Malnutrition and the road have taken their toll on his body. Over 25 pounds lost” (Krakauer, 37). His body shriveled – “[h]is face ... horribly emaciated, almost skeletal” (199) –, Chris does not look human anymore. He has become a residue, a cursed soul imprisoned inside a broken down minibus. What is left from Chris, Huck, and Dean at the end of their tragic journeys? What remains from their presence except from invisible traces on the road? One may say that the desperate travellers become ghosts, keeping roaming the road for eternity. “Forever alive, forever forward ... They go! they go! I know that they go, but I know not where they go” (Whitman, 133) sings Walt Whitman in his “Song of the Open Road.” As explained before, Huck’s journey to the Territory never became material. At the end of Mark Twain’s novel, the boy disappears, keeping moving beyond the boundaries of the narration, keeping existing beyond fiction. Whereas he was trying to escape from a ghost throughout his adventures, he finally became one himself, an American ghost lighting out to the Territory for eternity. That image

²⁴ A quotation from the Book of Job accompanies that statement, opening the Epilogue of *Moby Dick*: “And I only am escaped alone to tell there” (Melville, 723)

may remind the one of a “poor little madman” (Kerouac, 105) that Sal Paradise encounters during one of his numerous trip to New York City: the “Ghost of the Susquehanna”:

It was the night of the Ghost of the Susquehanna. The Ghost was a shriveled little old man with a paper satchel who claimed he was headed for «Canady.» He walked very fast, commanding me to follow, and said there was a bridge up ahead we could cross. He was about sixty years old

(Kerouac, 105)

On the Road was written about sixty years after *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Moreover, the little man who has “[b]een walkin this country for years” (105) is actually going West instead of East – “Look here, fella, you’re on your way west, not east. ... [T]his ain’t the road to Canada” – which may remind Huck’s desperate enterprise to reach the free states while drifting south. It goes without saying that it would be way too far-fetched to claim that this “poor forlorn man, poor lost sometime boy, now broken ghost of the penniless wilds” (105) is no one but old Huckleberry Finn. However, one could be allowed to say that the oneiric figure of the Ghost of Susquehanna is a symbol of all those broken wanderers who lost themselves on the mad road. The little old man embodies the tragedy of movement, just like Hassel and Old Dean Moriarty, just like those lost men that Sal observes in an “all-night movie” (245), those “young longhaired hipsters who’d reached the end of the road and were drinking wine ... with nothing to do, nowhere to go, nobody to believe in” (245).

In On the Road, all those ghostly characters work as prophecies announcing Dean Moriarty’s tragic fate. As explained before, Dean progressively becomes invisible as he falls into madness. People stop listening to him or considering his crazy plans. In the very end, he becomes mute as a ghost and can only stalk the American road. The more the narration advances, the more Dean Moriarty encloses himself in a past history. Constantly telling old tales about his past, about his father and about road, Dean Moriarty cuts himself from the present he always praises. As Sal tells him at the very end of the novel: “Dear Dean, it’s the end of the first half of the century” (Kerouac, 305-306). Before that, he had introduced him to a girl as being a cowboy: “I was drunk and told her he was a cowboy” (248). The lost wanderer has become a myth, a tragic legend of the American road, pathetically “[drinking] in [a] saloon like the ghost of his father” (263). Looking for his ghostly father throughout his American journey, Dean eventually became a ghost himself. The parallel between the two ghostly Moriartys is made explicit in the very last line of the novel: “I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty” (307). Walking in his father’s footsteps, Dean has become a wandering spirit ready

to haunt the following generations. One may indeed suggest that Dean will reproduce Old Dean Moriarty's curse, that the man "three times married, twice divorced" (303) will become a ghost for the "two baby girls" (303) he never took care of. The theme of circularity here strikes again, Dean Moriarty and Old Dean Moriarty perhaps being nothing but slightly different versions of an immortal original form.

Conclusion – "O public road... I am not afraid to leave you - yet I love you"

In *Romance of the Road*, Ronal Primeau highlights an important narrative element dividing the genre of American road literature: "The choices of where, when, and why to turn back are crucial factors shaping the quest. Some head home following a clear plan, others by necessity and still others try to keep going" (Primeau, 129). The heroes of the corpus considered in this master accumulate resemblances. They are all young men, all going on the road at a pivotal moment of their lives, all fleeing before searching, all torn by a series of paradoxes. The most important similitude yet relies on that inability to "turn back" (Primeau, 129) in time and to put an end to the wandering. On that matter, Sal Paradise detaches himself from Dean, Chris and Huckleberry Finn – which may explain why Theado claims that "the hero of *On the Road* is really Dean" (Theado, 63). Dean Moriarty, Chris McCandless and Huckleberry Finn are all tragic heroes, wandering men who lost themselves on the road. They failed both their quests and their escapes but they never failed movement. That movement that was supposed to set them free only progressively transformed itself into a dangerous addiction and turned the wanderers into lonesome prisoners, mad ghosts cloistered in the circular American road of their dreams. In one of the stanzas of Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road," the I-speaker wonders "O highway I travel, do you say to me, Do not leave me? ... Do you say, Venture not? If you leave me, you are lost? Do you say, ... adhere to me?" (Whitman, 128). To that series of interrogations, the poet wisely answers "O public road! I say back, I am not afraid to leave you – yet I love you" (Whitman, 128). Here is the main difference between Whitman's poem and the three road novels of the corpus of this master's thesis. One is a wise and sensible celebration of the road; the others are addicting and dramatic consumption of movement. One is a song, the others are tragedies.

Writing in Movement

Conclusion

[T]here ain't nothing more to write about,
and I am rotten glad of it

(Twain, 281)

This master's thesis attempted to analyze different aspects of the restless movement leading the narrations of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *On the Road* and *Into the Wild*. The analysis of this multi-faceted movement – of its complexity, motivations, implications and evolution – attempted to virtualize latent information and to make emerge innovative interpretations of these three American road novels. Voyaging from escape to search and tragically ending with devastating addiction, the different journeys of these three novels all schematically follow an uncannily similar pattern. The first chapter of this master's thesis focused on the idea of movement as a means of escape and rejection. It therefore allowed to make parallels between different types of flights: from civilization, from women, from fathers or from the sands of time. The second chapter of this master's thesis attempted to show how search and escape remain intrinsically connected throughout the narrations of these three novels. On the road, fathers are both praised and killed. Solitude is both dreamed and feared. Women are both searched and rejected. First depicted as a liberating playground – allowing all search, escape, protest and performance – the magical road yet eventually reveals itself as a trap. The third chapter of this master's thesis attempted to focus on the tragic mutation of the journey. Imprisoned in a series of paradoxes, the wanderer restlessly advances and progressively realizes that he is actually following the line of an endless loop. Once movement itself is unmasked as the ultimate destination, the dreamlike trip becomes nothing but a tragic wandering. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *On the Road* and *Into the Wild* are all variations of that tragedy of unstoppable movement. In this way, they all stand out as representatives of what could be identified as a subpart of the genre of American road literature.

As well as allowing a different perspective and proposing an effective critical approach, the thematic of movement deeply influenced the elaboration, style, structure and methodology of this project. One may say that this critical approach – thoroughly focusing on the different facets of movement – could efficiently be pursued beyond the analysis of American road literature. Indeed, movement does not need a road to organize the storyline of

a novel. As soon as there is a narration, there is a journey, with travellers, stopovers and destinations. The critical analysis of movement could therefore open new discussions and potentially enlighten various academic fields such as Gender Studies, Queer Theory, Eco-Criticism or Post-Colonial Studies.²⁵ In a more general way, one may say that focusing on a specific narrative element is an effective – not to say decisive – critical tool in the study of an artistic corpus. Different themes emerged from this study of movement, – themes such as freedom, fathers, ghosts or madness – each individually enriching the development of the analysis. It could now be interesting to imagine the result of a comparative analysis of that same corpus, focusing not on movement, but on one of these other narrative themes. Such a study would inevitably offer different viewpoints and perspectives; and therefore allow new interpretative levels of the texts and of the genre of American road literature.

Although the analysis developed throughout this master's thesis allowed an inventive perspective, there were different themes, ideas and hypotheses that inevitably did not have the chance to be discussed. This conclusion will therefore attempt to introduce one of those gray areas, suggesting a trail that could be pursued further in another academic work. A potential object of study – which was only briefly mentioned in the second and third chapters of this master's thesis²⁶ – revolves around the close relationship existing between moving and writing. Firstly, all the heroes of the novels considered in the corpus of this master's thesis are at least once described as the writers of their own adventures. As discussed in the second chapter of this project, Huckleberry Finn progressively affirms himself as an author throughout his odyssey and eventually makes us forget Mark Twain's narrative voice at the end of the novel. As for Sal Paradise – not to say Jack Kerouac – he presents himself as a writer from the beginning of the story. He is the one supposed to teach Dean Moriarty “how to write” (Kerouac, 6) and most importantly, the one who “did survive the wreck” (Melville, 723) and eventually transforms the experience of the journey into a story. By contrast, *Into the Wild* is a report, a nonfictional book whose author is not the travelling adventurer. However, Jon Krakauer repeatedly uses fragments from the journal that Chris McCandless

²⁵ Such a critical approach may recall what Bertrand Westphal named and introduced as “Geocriticism” in his 2005 essay “Pour une approche géocritique des textes”: “Isn't it time to think of articulating literature around its relations to space, to promote a *geocriticism* ...?” (Westphal, 16) [my translation]. In this essay, the French academic made a new perspective emerge, suggesting to focus on the relationship between text and *space* – rather than only considering *time* to analyze a literary work. Although strictly focusing on movement is more specific and exclusive than analyzing space, the critical approach guiding *Following Movement* cannot be elaborated without at least mentioning Westphal's work.

²⁶ See the discussion on Huckleberry Finn's claim to authorship on page 67, as well as the relationship between jazz, circularity, writing style and narrative structure from pages 87 to 89.

kept with him during his adventure. Besides, the young man once told Westerberg that “he was going to write a book about his travels” (Krakauer, 66) at the end of his journey. The fact that all these wanderers also are writers allows a wide range of discussion on the connection between physical and textual movement.

“[T]here’s so many things to do, so many things to write!” (Kerouac, 4) says Dean Moriarty to Sal Paradise at the beginning of the novel. Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* is a fascinating example on the relationship between writing and wandering. In April 1951, Kerouac typed *On the Road* in one go, nourished by a frenzy and spontaneity that may recall the ones that dictate Sal and Dean’s restless wandering. As the American author explains in a letter he wrote to Neal Cassidy, he finished the manuscript after three weeks of non-stop composition on a continuous roll of paper: “I’ve telled all the road now. Went fast because road is fast ... wrote whole thing on strip of paper 120 foot long ... just rolled it through typewriter and in fact no paragraphs ... rolled it out on floor and it looks like a road” (Kerouac, *Selected Letters*, 315). This powerful image of merging the road and the roll makes explicit the connection between physical and textual movement. As Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet suggest in *Dialogues II*: “It is possible that writing has an intrinsic relationship with lines of flight. To write is to trace lines of flight which are not imaginary and which one is indeed forced to follow” (Deleuze – Parnet, 43). By putting words down on a piece of paper, the writer invites the reader to accompany him on a journey. Following the movement of the narration, both writer and reader become wanderers, adventurers fleeing from reality by travelling within fiction. Like movement, writing allows escape, quest and personal investigation. Like movement, writing can turn into a rebellion, a way to protest and a means of confrontation. Like movement, writing may also never end, become a destination nor find its resolution.

Writing *Following Movement* has been a difficult wandering, a dangerous voyage in between novels, ideas and hypotheses. I started this project without a real itinerary, aimlessly wandering across the texts, merely searching for connections and interpretations. The writing of an academic text demands different requirements from the writing of a novel. If you can perhaps safely wander in a work of fiction, you cannot get lost in a critical analysis. Without having defined any clear direction, I progressively lost myself in an overwhelming amount of trails and ideas. I was moving everywhere. I was moving nowhere; desperately trying to justify the essence of my critical journey. That initial failure certainly inspired the topic of my second attempt, for respecting a line of reflection – and not a “line of flight” – became one of the most important challenges of the writing of this master’s thesis. The first sentence of *Sea*

and Sardinia – D.H. Lawrence’s travel narrative telling his Italian journey from Sicilia to Sardinia – claims that the “necessity to move” must be accompanied by a necessity to aim:

Comes over one an absolute necessity to move. And what is more, to move in some particular direction. A double necessity then, to get on the move, and to know whither.

(Lawrence, 1)

As already explained in the general introduction to this thesis, a comparative approach cannot succeed without a guiding line giving it a direction. Like a lost wanderer traveling without motive, a comparative analysis that does not rigorously stick to a guiding line takes the risk of dramatically going round and round in circles, suggesting ideas without actually demonstrating anything. It dramatically pursues itself, only meant to keep searching, doomed to never find its final period.

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